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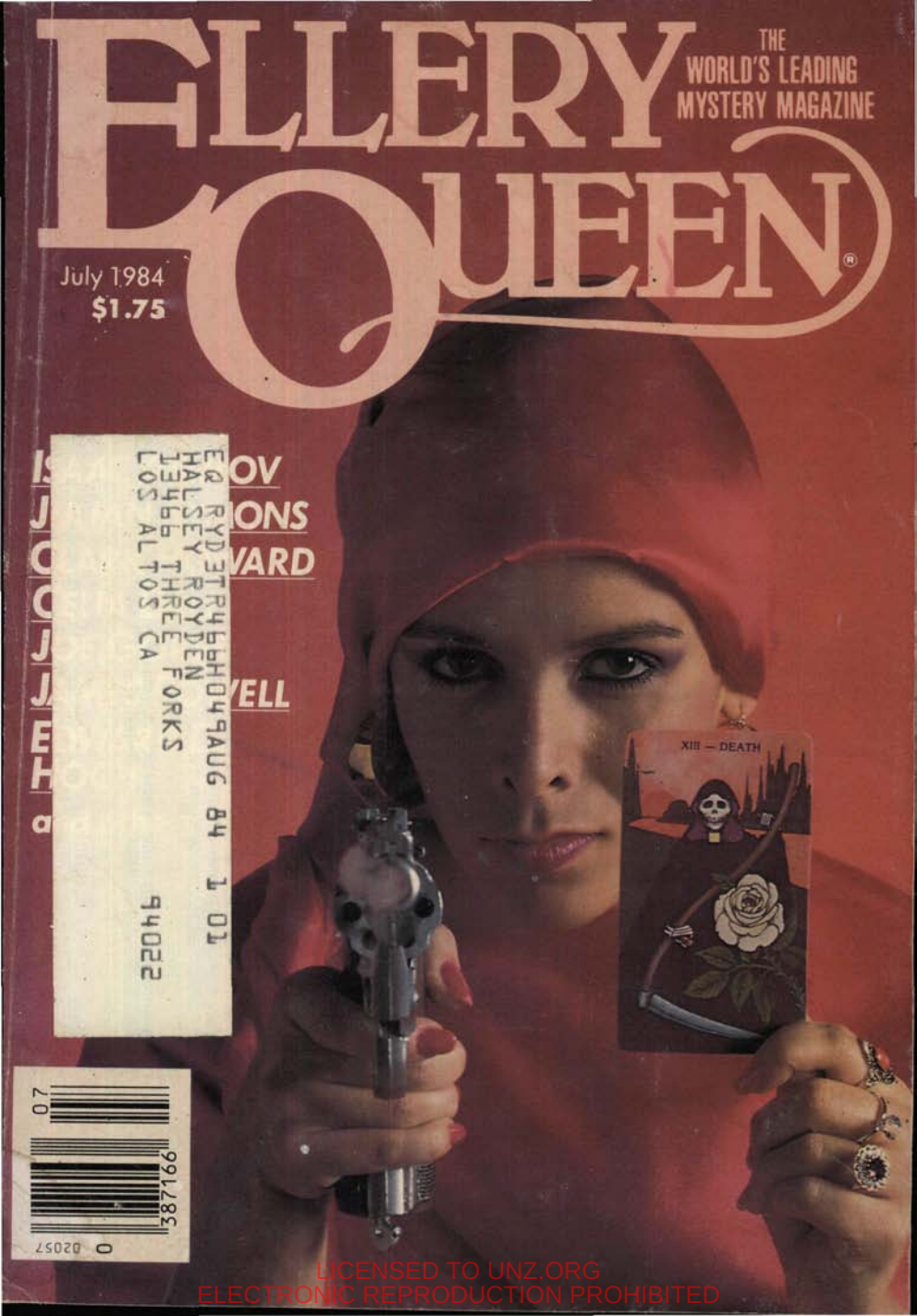

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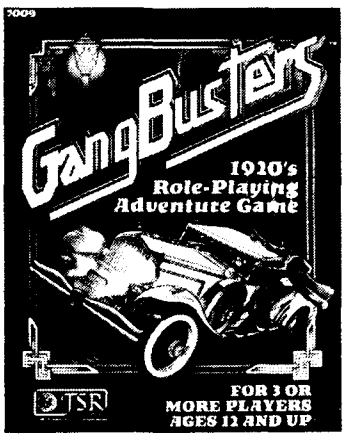

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a *NEW* Jeffery Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Three other former British Intelligence agents had died within six months of each other, Gerald Baxter worried as he went out to his garden to prune the roses. Their names were one behind the other on the retirement list. And Gerald's name was next . . .

THE SPY AT THE TOP OF THE LIST

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Gerald Baxter had lived most of his adult life on the fine edge of danger. Even after his early retirement from British Intelligence, he'd found it difficult to shed his careful routines and mannerisms. The mailbox was always checked for invisible trip-wires before he opened it, and any unexpected visitors to his country cottage north of London were met with outright suspicion.

His wife Milly noticed his nervousness increased after he read in the papers about the deaths of two people he'd worked with. And then one morning at breakfast he read of Felix Held's death in a motoring accident. He'd worked with Felix on a number of overseas assignments before being relegated to a record-keeping chore. They were about the same age and had retired within a year of each other.

"Felix is dead," he told Milly. "I could be next."

"Don't be foolish," she chided him, taking the newspaper and reading the brief account of the traffic accident. "People die in auto smashes every day."

"That's three former agents in the past six months. It's no coincidence." He stabbed a finger at the page. "Lost control of the car

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and hit a tree! Felix was the best driver I knew. He'd never lose control of a car."

"The man was sixty-one years old, Gerald."

"What about it? And what about the other two—Steinmitz and Mrs. Collins? She died in her forties of an unexplained heart attack. And he committed suicide for no apparent reason at all. Three in six months—all retired from the service. It's no coincidence, I tell you!"

"Have you tried speaking to Hastings?" Milly asked, attempting to calm him.

"What good would that do? For all I know, the government could be behind it."

"Gerald!"

"It wouldn't be the first time. I've heard stories about agents in the field who knew too much, foreign nationals who'd outlived their usefulness."

"You're not a foreign national," she reminded him. "You're a British citizen, retired from the service."

"So were the other three. Our names were one behind the other on the retirement list. It's as if someone were going down the list, killing us one at a time."

"One suicide, one heart attack, and one automobile accident. There's nothing suspicious unless you're looking for something that isn't there."

"Maybe," he replied, unconvinced.

"Go out and tend to the roses," Milly suggested. "It'll take your mind off things."

He did as she said, careful to slip his little Beretta automatic into the basket along with the gardening equipment.

The garden was at the back of the yard, bordering on a wooded area that served as a buffer between their property and the highway to London. Baxter liked to work there. Pruning the rose bushes had a calming effect on him. Though he could hear the passing traffic beyond the trees, it was still a place of peaceful contemplation for him.

But this morning there was something foreign in among the rose bushes. A box. A tiny box such as a ring might come in.

Too small to hide a bomb, certainly.

But where had it come from? And what was it doing there?

He approached it carefully, searching the adjoining ground for any sign of a wire or string. There was nothing. Using a trowel, he

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dug away some of the earth under the box, making certain it was not booby-trapped in any way. Then he lifted it gingerly from the dirt, checking that there was no poisoned needle or nail to prick his skin.

The tiny box was very light, probably empty. There was no latch. The top was the kind that swung back on a spring. Perhaps it contained an engagement ring, hurled from a passing car by an irate young lady. The trees would have made that difficult, of course, but it might have happened.

Holding the box at arm's length, he opened it.

Rand shifted uneasily in the chair opposite Hastings' desk, not liking what he was hearing. "Four of them? Four in six months' time?"

Hastings nodded. "The last two—Felix Held and Gerald Baxter—just this week. Held was killed in a one-car auto accident and Baxter was stung by a bee."

"A bee?"

"He was allergic to bee venom. It was noted on his record. Almost killed him once before."

"What about the others? Anything suspicious there?"

"Well, Steinmitz was the first to die, early in January. He shot himself, apparently. He was alone at the time, and anything might have happened. In the spring, Mrs. Collins died of a heart attack. She had no history of heart trouble and she was only in her forties, but we didn't question it at the time."

"There are poisons that can mimic a heart attack," Rand pointed out.

"Of course, and they've been used by both sides on occasion. But you must remember, Rand, that we had no reason to suspect anything out of the ordinary. It wasn't until Held died this week, and then Baxter—"

"All four retired from British Intelligence?"

Hastings nodded. "Three of them after lengthy careers—Mrs. Collins after only one or two special assignments in the Middle East. The thing is, Rand, they retired in order, about eight years ago. It's as if someone were going down a list."

"Is there a list?"

"Well, of course. There are pensions, health care, family benefits, all sorts of things—we have to keep a list. As a matter of fact, Baxter's final position with us was in personnel. He had charge of

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that very thing, which is why he recognized the names in the newspaper. His wife tells me he was extremely upset the morning he read about Felix Held's death. She sent him out to work in the rose garden and less than an hour later he was dead."

"Why did he work in the yard if he was allergic to bee stings?"

"Bees will rarely sting you unless they're annoyed. Baxter had learned to stay out of their way. But this one was different."

"How?" Rand asked.

"Baxter lived about five minutes after being stung—long enough to kill the bee and tell his wife what happened. He found a little box in the rose garden, one of those jewelers' boxes that rings come in. The bee was inside it. Stung him on the forearm."

"It seems like an awfully chancy way to kill someone."

"Not so chancy. We had a bee expert look at the creature. It wasn't any of the local varieties, it was a giant red bee, a species found over much of South America. They're particularly vicious. And after being cooped up in that box, it probably stung the first thing it encountered."

"What do you want me to do?" Rand asked. "I seem to remember your promise not to bother me again."

"This is something special, Jeffery, concerning us all. The next name on the list is a woman named Laura Alcott. She lives here in London. I want you to keep her alive, if you can."

"This isn't an assignment for me," Rand argued. "Turn it over to Scotland Yard."

Hastings shook his head. "They can't handle it. The killer knew about Baxter's bee-sting allergy. That implies someone with access to his file here. We can't have Scotland Yard people mucking up this place. Besides, there's another reason why it has to be you."

"What's that?" Rand asked.

"If something happens to Laura Alcott, your name is next on the list."

The most difficult part for Rand was phoning home to tell Leila he'd be spending a few days in London. He was careful not to alarm her, but he did admit it was a special assignment from Hastings.

"Won't that man ever leave you alone?" she asked.

"I'll call you tomorrow," Rand promised. "Don't worry. It's just routine."

Laura Alcott had become a mildly well known choreographer. Rand found her at work rehearsing a new musical comedy at a

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theater on Shaftesbury Avenue. She was a handsome, long-legged woman in her early forties and still looked good in leotards.

"How did you get my name?" she asked Rand when he identified himself during a break in the rehearsal.

"Hastings gave it to me. You must remember Hastings."

"I'm through with that life," she said. "I never think about it."

"Is there someplace we can talk?"

She sighed and gestured toward the waiting dancers. "I'm at work, or hadn't you noticed?"

"Give me ten minutes. It could be a matter of life and death."

Laura Alcott laughed humorlessly at that, but, "All right," she called to the dancers, "take ten!"

Rand followed her off the stage and into a dressing room, where she poured herself a cup of coffee. Almost as an afterthought she asked, "Want one?"

"Yes, thanks." When he had it in hand, he told her, "I was director of Concealed Communications for ten years. I retired just after you did."

She took a sip of coffee. "I'd hardly call my leaving retirement. I failed my first mission and they dropped me. I suppose I should count myself lucky. They allowed me to take special retirement rather than firing me outright."

"That's most unusual. Were you wounded?"

She turned her face away. "I never talk about it. If you want to know badly enough, I'm sure Hastings will show you my file."

Rand sighed. "It doesn't matter what happened eight years ago, Laura. What matters is what's happening now. Four people who retired just ahead of you have all died recently—two of them just this week. There's a possibility they were murdered."

She smiled at that, and he saw for an instant the ghost of a younger, prettier woman. "You men spend your entire lives at these little games, don't you?"

"It's no game. I'm retired the same as you. Hastings asked me to investigate this."

"It's still a game, and I'm out of it—thank God! Now if you'll excuse me, I have fourteen dancers waiting."

"Miss Alcott, you could be dead by tomorrow morning."

She turned and stared at him, unsmiling now. "Do you really think I'd care?"

Later that afternoon, Rand was back in Hastings' office overlook-

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ing the Thames. The older man frowned as he listened to Rand's outline of his meeting with Laura Alcott. "I was hoping she'd be over it after all these years."

"She said she never talked about her past—said you'd have to show me her file if I wanted to know about it."

"I don't have to show it to you," Hastings said bleakly. "I remember it well enough. It happened just before you retired. You were involved in something else, so I didn't bother you with it. It had to do with Malkinson's death."

"Malkinson. They got him crossing the East German border."

Hastings nodded. "Laura Alcott was his contact in Paris. She was new, but it wasn't a very demanding task. All she had to do was receive his message, determine the spot where he'd be crossing over, and let us know so we could be there. But things started to go wrong on both ends. Malkinson couldn't send the prearranged cipher, so he had to improvise instead. He got a message to Laura containing a pair of Biblical verses. Let me get them from the file."

Rand waited while Hastings stepped into the next office and returned with a sealed manila envelope. He broke the seal and sorted through some papers until he found what he sought. "Here it is, just as he wrote it. *His brethren, now that their father was dead, grew afraid of Joseph. Genesis 50:15.* And beneath it, *Many of them rebuked him and told him to be silent, but he cried out all the more, Son of David, have pity on me. Mark 10:48.*"

"One from the Old Testament and one from the New," Rand remarked. "What text is that?"

"The modern translation of Ronald Knox. It's used by Catholics in England and Scotland."

"What happened then?"

"Well, she puzzled over the text, trying to find some German village that might have a connection with Joseph or David. Meanwhile, East German agents had followed the messenger to her Paris apartment. They forced their way in and found the message. They knew at once what he was trying to say, and they notified their superiors. Then they kept Laura there, a prisoner, for the next ten hours." He paused for a moment. "They took turns assaulting her until the call came through that Malkinson had been killed while trying to cross the border."

"God!"

Hastings sealed up the file again. "No one ever said it was a pleasant business, Rand. We all took the view she was lucky to have

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come through it alive, but she knew only that she'd failed her first important mission. It wasn't so much what happened to her as what happened to Malkinson. He died because she'd been unable to read a simple secret message that was immediately obvious to the East Germans."

Rand nodded. "It wasn't the words but the numbers that were important. The biblical chapter and verse were the latitude and longitude of his crossing point."

Hastings nodded confirmation. "At the southern tip of East Germany—latitude 50 degrees 15 minutes north, longitude 10 degrees 48 minutes east. They were waiting for him."

"And she never guessed it."

"She might have, with more time and a map. But they didn't give her much time." Hastings sighed and took out his pipe. Rand had rarely seen him smoke. "I was hoping she'd gotten over it, what with a new career. I understand she's had some success as a choreographer. But from what you tell me—"

"She doesn't want guards. If she dies, she dies. That's her attitude exactly. Tell me something—how old is she?"

"Thirty-six. She was twenty-eight when it happened."

"She looks over forty. Did she have training in the theater before you recruited her?"

"Ballet dancing. She went back to it after she left us. Not that she had to. I placed her on the retirement list myself and saw to it that she received a partial pension for medical reasons—injuries suffered in the line of duty."

"Which puts her at the top of the list for our murderer."

"If there is a list."

"Yes," Rand agreed. "If there is a list."

There was a list—at least as far as British Intelligence was concerned. The various departments of MI5 and MI6 maintained their own retirement lists, and a combined list—omitting only the most sensitive foreign nationals—was kept in the top-secret files of the accounting office in Hastings' building. Rand went downstairs with him and was introduced to Herbert Stroll, a middle-aged civil servant who'd been in charge of the files since Gerald Baxter's retirement eight years earlier.

"Retirement lists," Stroll said in answer to Hastings' request. "Well, you know that's classified information."

"I have clearance," Hastings assured him, "and so does Rand for

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purposes of this investigation. You may check that with the top if you wish."

Stroll did check, before reluctantly returning with the sheets detailing length of service and date of separation. Though nothing about individual assignments was recorded, they would still have been invaluable to the enemy's intelligence gatherers.

Rand glanced through them, flipping past his own retirement record with no more interest than the others. "This is all you have? No service records or medical records?"

"That's the lot," Herbert Stroll confirmed. "You know how compartmentalized things are around here. Need-to-know, and all that sort of thing."

"Thank you," Rand said, returning the records to him.

On the way back to Hastings' office, he asked, "Was that the same place Gerald Baxter worked?"

"The very same," Hastings confirmed. "Things don't change rapidly around here—certainly not in a mere eight years. Did you find what you wanted?"

"Yes and no."

Rand was waiting outside the theater on Shaftesbury Avenue when the rehearsal ended at dinnertime. Laura Alcott came out with two of the female dancers, laughing and looking more relaxed than at their earlier meeting. Then she saw Rand and the smile froze.

"Could I speak with you alone, Miss Alcott?"

"I don't think so. I'm on my way to dinner." The two young women walked on, slowing their pace.

"I wanted you to know I did ask Hastings about your file."

"I knew you would."

"Could we talk about it?"

"You have nothing to say that could interest me, Mr. Rand."

"Wouldn't you like to live long enough to see the show open?"

She hesitated, then said, "All right, I'll talk to you." She caught up with the dancers and told them to go on without her, then returned to Rand.

"I suggest dinner," he said. "You shouldn't miss it because of me."

She agreed to a small, inexpensive restaurant around the corner on Charing Cross Road. "Who's trying to kill me?" she said when they were seated, coming directly to the point.

"I wish we knew." He told her about the other four deaths, not

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adding that he was next on the list after her. "It could be enemy agents or just some psychopath with a grudge against the entire Intelligence community. It could even be the government itself, though I strongly doubt it."

"I was in the business for a very short while, as you must know. And I was totally unsuccessful at it. I would hardly constitute a threat to either side—if there are sides to this thing."

"There are always sides," Rand told her. "Right now I'm just concerned with keeping you alive. The killer seems to have a way of striking at his victims' weaknesses."

"I've plenty of those."

Rand hesitated and then decided to speak up. "Look, what happened to you could have happened to anyone."

"Oh, really?"

"I meant—"

She held up a hand. "I know, I know. Forgive me. I'm in a mood."

"You're working hard at another profession and seem to be successful at it. Can't you try to forget the past?"

"Sure. I can *try* anything."

"Then try helping me to protect you. Have there been any unusual incidents in your life lately? Any strangers?" She shook her head. He sighed. "Do you have any ideas about this at all?"

She tilted her head slightly and asked, "Have you tried going backward instead of forward?"

"What?"

"How about the retired agents ahead of Steinmitz? Was he really the first? And if so, why?"

"That's a good point," he admitted. "We should check it."

"Meanwhile, don't worry so much about me. I do want to see the play open, and I'm not quite as indifferent about my own life as I sound."

"I'm glad of that."

After dinner he escorted her to her little flat in Soho, then he left her. Hastings had promised to have someone watching the place, and Rand hoped that would be enough to protect her.

In the morning he was back at his old building, obtaining permission from Hastings to delve into the files. "Before Steinmitz," he said. "We should have thought of that."

Stroll brought him the list he needed and Rand set to work checking out addresses. The man immediately ahead of Steinmitz was a

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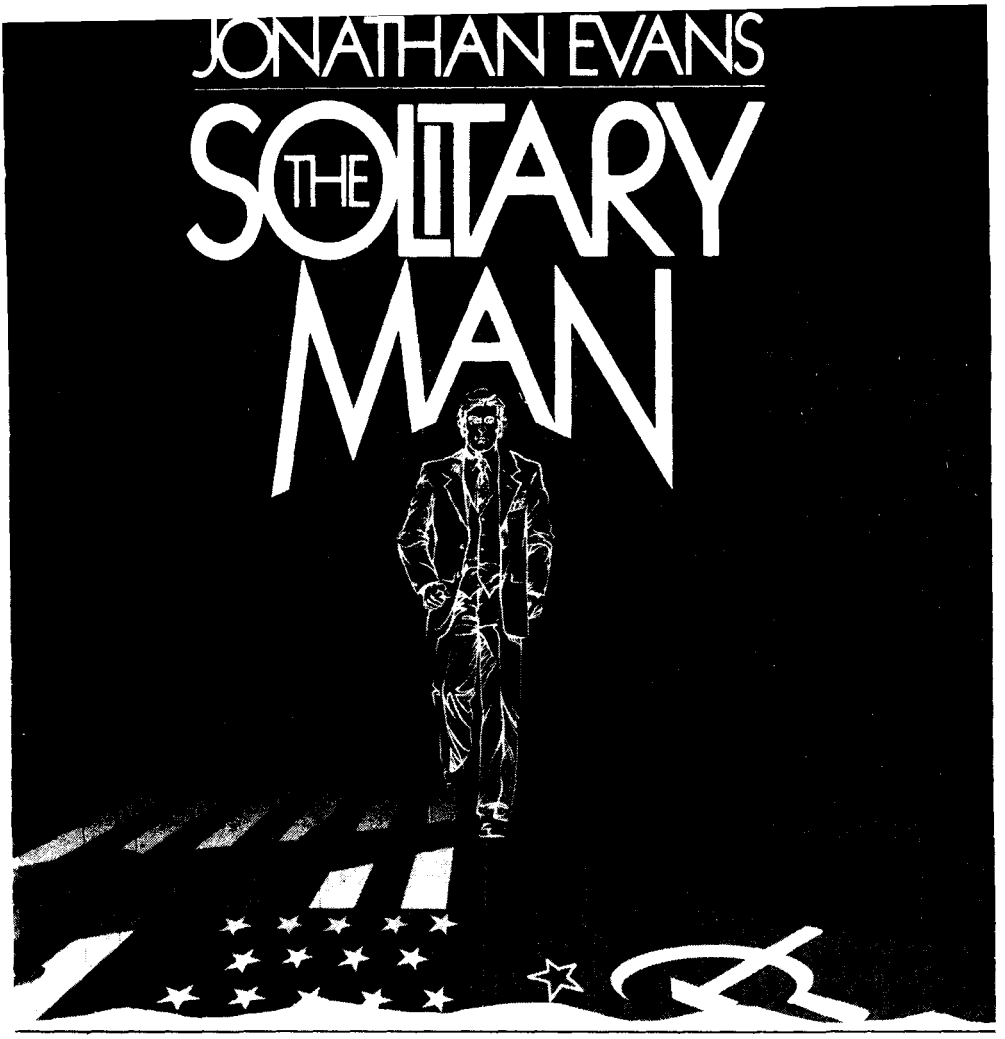
THE SOLITARY MAN



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foreign national residing in Prague. His name was classified even within the building, though regular pension checks were mailed to him under a pseudonym at a Prague post-office box.

"I need to know if he's alive," Rand argued.

Herbert Stroll creased his forehead in thought. "Well, the checks are cashed regularly. We have no reason to believe him dead."

"But if he is dead, wouldn't it be to someone's advantage to make him appear alive, so the payments would keep coming?"

"That couldn't be done," Stroll said. "At least, I don't think it could."

Rand went back to Hastings. "This nameless pensioned agent in Prague—I need to know if he's still alive. Your records don't satisfy me."

"I'll have someone check on him," Hastings promised. "I'm going out to Baxter's funeral this noon. Want to come along?"

"I might as well."

The services were held at a little country church near the Baxter home. There were a fair number of local people in attendance, plus a scattering of faces familiar to Rand from London. After the burial in the churchyard, Rand sought out the widow—a tall woman dressed in black, escorted by a slightly older man who appeared to be a brother. Milly Baxter had high cheekbones, which Rand had always found attractive, and he guessed she must have been somewhat younger than her husband—in her late forties at the most.

"I remember Gerald speaking of you, Mr. Rand," she said after he'd introduced himself and offered condolences. "This is my brother Timothy."

"I want you to know, Mrs. Baxter, that the government is investigating every aspect of your husband's death."

Timothy moved away to greet some of the other mourners and Milly Baxter said, "I still remember how disturbed he was that morning when he read about Felix Held's death in the newspaper. He was sure someone was killing all you agents on the retired list and now I am, too. I'm concerned about the next name on the list, whoever it might be."

"We have her under guard," Rand said. "She's the choreographer for a new musical that's opening at the Gaiety Theatre. There are people around her all day, and we watch her at night. She should be safe."

"Good."

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"Had you noticed any strangers in the area lately, especially near your garden?"

"No one," Mrs. Baxter said with a shake of her head. "What kind of person do you think could do a thing like this?"

"That's what we're trying to find out. The motive might not be what it seems."

She started to say something else, but her brother interrupted, gently guiding her to meet an older couple with sorrowful faces. Rand turned away and walked back to where Hastings was waiting by the car. "Learn anything?"

"No." Rand slipped into the front seat. "Have you had any luck tracing that South American bee?"

"Anybody could bring one back."

"It's a long way to go for a murder weapon when a domestic bee would have done almost as well. More likely the bee was available to the killer and he chose it because of its fierce reputation. Let's find out if they're imported by any labs for research."

He telephoned Laura Alcott that night and she assured him everything was fine. At last he felt he could spend the night in his own home and he took the eight o'clock train to Reading. Leila asked the usual questions, but he could only tell her that the case wasn't over.

"Will you be on these so-called cases the rest of your life?" she wanted to know.

"No."

"Why did you retire in the first place, Jeffery?"

"Why did any of them retire?"

"Any of whom?" she asked, and then he had to tell her a little about the case. When he'd finished, she said, "Then your own life could be in danger."

"No more so than it was many times in the past."

"But you were getting paid for it then."

He took her hand. "Don't worry. I'm not at the top of that list yet."

"But this woman Laura Alcott is."

"Yes," he admitted, and shortly thereafter he phoned her again at her apartment to make sure she was all right.

In the morning, early, he had a call from Hastings. "I have something you might be interested in, Rand. About that South American bee."

"What is it?"

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"They're imported for research by a pharmaceutical house in Leeds."

"That's pretty far north of here to have any connection."

"But some of the research is done at a subsidiary in Maidenhead. Do you like that better?"

"Maidenhead! The town where Felix Held had his fatal accident!"

"Exactly."

"Then there is a connection!"

"There could be."

"It's not far from me. I'll drive over there this morning."

Leeds Pharmaceuticals, Southern Division, was a low, sprawling building set in a wooded area outside of town. Rand quickly established that a half dozen people had access to the giant red bees being used in studies of a drug to counter anaphylactic shock. He talked to some of them without learning anything useful. The bees weren't counted or inventoried in any accurate manner. One or two could easily have been taken without anyone knowing the difference.

Then a doctor named Sanholp happened to mention something interesting. "The chap you should talk to is Bruce Forsythe. He's in our purchasing department. I found him in here a couple of weeks ago with the bees and kidded him about stealing some."

Dr. Sanholp was smiling as he said it, but Rand took him up immediately on the suggestion. "Where would Forsythe be likely to be now?"

"In the purchasing office, I imagine."

But in the purchasing office they told Rand that Bruce Forsythe had called in ill that morning. Rand asked for his home address. It was a long shot, but long shots had paid off for him before.

The address proved to be a rooming house in town. The landlady sniffed at his questions and finally said, "He's not here. I think he was catching the train into London. He left at a run just before train time."

Rand thanked her and headed for London himself, a sense of unease growing within him. This man Forsythe was something of a loner, apparently, without a home or family. The sort who could turn into a psychopathic personality, given the necessary motive.

But what motive?

When he arrived in London, just before noon, he telephoned Has-

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tings to tell him what little he'd learned. To his surprise, Hastings said, "Forget this fellow Forsythe. We've got a new lead."

"What's that?"

"Laura Alcott."

Rand didn't understand. "Has anything happened to her?" he asked, suddenly chilled with fear.

"After her incident eight years ago, she was treated by one of our staff psychiatrists for a period of four months. I've been reviewing his confidential notes and they show she reacted to her failed mission with an intense hatred for her own side. Somehow she tried to shift the blame to us, saying we sent her out ill-equipped, that we let her down. It's quite possible this latent feeling might manifest itself in violent actions against other British agents, including other retired ones."

"After eight years?" Rand scoffed. "She's as normal as you are, Hastings. Right now she's all wrapped up in this new play."

"Check her out for me," Hastings suggested coolly. "And, by the way—that man in Prague is still alive."

Rand hung up. His initial reaction was to ignore the directive from Hastings. He knew what the man wanted—that Rand should break into her apartment like a common thief and see what he could find—but the notion was repellent to him.

Still, it might satisfy Hastings if he could report he'd found nothing.

He took the Underground to a stop near Laura's flat and walked the rest of the way. He knew there was no guard on the place during the day when she was at rehearsals, and it took him only a few moments to pick the simple lock on her door.

The Soho flat was as he remembered it from his brief previous visit. It was only a few blocks from her theater, but he knew Laura would be working through the lunch hour. He started with the bookshelves and found something at once—a copy of the Bible in the translation of Ronald Knox. —She was still, it seemed, very close to those events of eight years back.

Rand was just opening a drawer in a cluttered desk when he heard a floorboard creak behind him. Before he could turn, something hard came down on his head.

He grew increasingly conscious of his surroundings, first remembering the apartment and then the blow to his head. He could feel

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it throbbing, but when he reached out to touch it he found he couldn't move his arm.

He was tied tightly to one of the kitchen chairs.

He opened his eyes, and a dark-haired man he'd never seen before said, "Ah, you've come to! Very good!"

"Who are you?" Rand managed to ask.

"Well, now, *I* should be asking those questions. Only I don't need to, Mr. Rand. It was good of you to be carrying identification. It saved me the trouble."

"What did you hit me with?"

"A gun barrel." He showed Rand an American-made .38-caliber revolver. "You were out for nearly an hour. I'm sorry about that."

"I'll bet you are. What are you doing here?"

The dark-haired man smiled slightly, but there was no humor in his expression. "Waiting for Laura Alcott. You guard the theater by day and this apartment by night, so it occurred to me that I should enter the place by day when no one's watching it."

Suddenly Rand knew who he was. "You're Bruce Forsythe, aren't you? A purchaser at Leeds Pharmaceuticals."

"My! You have been doing your homework!"

"Why did you kill those people?"

"Motives are so hard to explain, aren't they? Actually, Felix Held's death was something of an accident. I put one of the bees in his car, as a sort of test. It caused him to run into a tree, poor chap."

"And now you're waiting for Laura Alcott?"

"She's next on the list, isn't she?"

"And you'll kill me, too. Because I know who you are."

"Of course," Forsythe admitted readily.

"That'll be two for one, since my name follows Laura's on the retirement list."

Forsythe seemed surprised at the news. "*Does* it? Well, that makes it just dandy. Perhaps a nice little murder and suicide—a lovers' quarrel of some sort."

"Only Laura won't be home after work. She's spending the night with a friend."

Forsythe's face suddenly changed. His triumphant smile was replaced by a look of frustration. "You're just saying that—it's not true."

"Wait and see."

Forsythe thought about it, pacing back and forth in the little kitchen area. "Is it true?" he asked finally.

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"It is. You've got me but you won't get her."

Rand could see his mind working. "But you can get her to come here," Forsythe said slyly.

"Yes," Rand agreed, "of course. Let me phone her."

"No—no phone! A message. You can send her a message. Something I'll dictate to you. I'll phone a messenger service and have it delivered to the theater."

He found a pen and paper in the desk and untied Rand's right hand. "No tricks, now, or I'll kill you on the spot. Start writing: *Dear Laura, Important I meet you at your apartment at four this afternoon. Don't fail me.* And then sign your name. That should bring her."

"It'll bring her guards, too."

"They'll be outside. They'll never guess I'm in here waiting for her."

"All right," Rand said, signing his name to the brief note. "But she won't come. She'll know something's wrong. When I send her notes, I always include a funny little Bible passage."

"What?"

"It's just a thing between us."

"I don't believe you."

"Bring me that Bible on the shelf there and I'll show you."

Forsythe hesitated, holding the gun ready. Finally he walked to the bookshelf and returned with the Bible. "I'm not untying you any further. And if you try anything, I'll knock you out again."

Rand balanced the book on his knees and searched quickly through Genesis and Exodus. "Here it is," he said at last. "She calls the director of the show the king of Egypt because he's such a slave driver. Let me write this passage at the bottom of the note and she'll know it's from me."

Forsythe read the passage. "All right—I'll dictate it to you: *I know well enough that the king of Egypt will not let you go, except under strong compulsion.*"

Rand wrote it in his careful script. "Good. What's the chapter and verse number so I can put it at the bottom?"

"*Exodus 3:19.*"

Rand finished writing with his free hand and passed the sheet of paper to his captor.

"This better not be a trick," Forsythe warned. "If she comes here with the police I'll be ready—and you'll be the first to die."

He telephoned a messenger service and handed the envelope to the teenaged boy who arrived at the door a half hour later. He had

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retied Rand's free right hand by then and there was nothing for them both to do but wait. Rand could see the digital clock over the kitchen stove. It showed the time as 2:13.

Forsythe didn't want to talk about his crimes and after a time he silenced Rand's questions with a handkerchief gag and took up a position at the window, watching the narrow Soho street below.

The hour dragged on, and shortly after three o'clock Rand's captor took a bottle of beer from the refrigerator and opened it. "How does it feel to be waiting to die?" he asked. "I'm sorry I can't remove your gag and share a beer with you, but she'll be coming soon and I don't want you shouting any kind of warning to her." He tasted the beer. "Ah, that's good. I was thirsty. Don't worry, I'll wipe off the fingerprints when I'm finished—and maybe put some of yours on."

Suicide, he'd told Rand. Murder and suicide.

Well, if he should kill them, it wouldn't look like that, Rand thought. He had been carefully turning his left wrist until the rope had rubbed it raw. If it turned out badly for him, they'd spot that at the autopsy and know he'd been tied up before being shot. That was some slight consolation.

But his real hope rested with Laura.

Had she received the message, or was it resting in her backstage dressing room while she led the dancers through their routines?

Laura.

3:16.

Forsythe finished his beer and strolled back to the window, keeping the pistol in his right hand.

3:17.

Rand shifted in his chair, trying to get more comfortable. Forsythe glanced once in his direction.

3:18.

Rand began counting off the seconds in his mind. When he reached fifty, he suddenly lurched to his left side, pulling the chair over with him as he hit the floor with a bone-numbing crash.

"What in hell—" Bruce Forsythe whirled, bringing up the revolver for a shot at Rand, just as the clock above the stove registered 3:19.

There was a splintering crash as the outside door gave way, and then the room seemed filled with people. Hastings was there somewhere, twisting the weapon from Forsythe's grasp, and so was Laura Alcott, still in her dancer's tights with a sweater thrown over her shoulders.

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It was she who helped to cut his bonds and told him with a smile, "You knew I wouldn't miss it a second time."

"I was counting on it," Rand said when she untied the gag from his mouth.

"The message said to come at four, but the biblical chapter and verse read 3:19. I phoned Hastings and told him you must be in trouble."

"That's it?" Hastings asked when they had the handcuffs on Forsythe. "It's over?"

"Not yet," Rand said.

Milly Baxter opened the door to admit Rand a few hours later. "I was just eating my dinner," she said, somewhat flustered. "I wasn't expecting any callers."

"Pardon me for interrupting, but I thought you'd want to know that the police have Bruce Forsythe in custody."

"Bruce—" The color drained from her face.

"If you two were in love, couldn't you simply have divorced Gerald rather than killing two people and trying to kill more?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Steinmitz and Mrs. Collins just happened to die. Suicide and heart attack, as reported. But when your husband mentioned they were former Intelligence workers, on the retirement list ahead of him, you and Forsythe concocted this mad scheme. What was it? Money? An estate you didn't want to lose through divorce? So Forsythe stole some South American bees from work, because of course you knew your husband was sensitive to them. He tried one in Felix Held's car, with unhoped-for results. Held died and it seemed to be an accident. Your husband feared for his life, but he couldn't have known you'd planted an angry bee in the rose garden. I almost suspect you sent him out to do the gardening on that fatal morning. Probably suggested it would relax him."

"You'll have trouble proving any of this," she said calmly, regaining her composure.

"I think not, Mrs. Baxter. You see, if some mad killer was really trying to murder retired agents of British Intelligence, he'd need a list of their names. Your list only went so far as your husband's retirement from that department. He didn't know who retired after him, so you and Forsythe didn't know, either. That's why there was no attempt on Laura Alcott's life until I foolishly mentioned her identity to you in the churchyard yesterday. And said I was looking

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into other motives for the crimes. You and Forsythe decided you had to kill one more time to be safe. He even knew when we were guarding her at the theater and at home, because I told you that, too. And Forsythe was surprised today when I told him I was next on the list. He didn't know that because I hadn't told you."

"Someone else could have had the list of retired agents. How about the man who now holds Gerald's position?"

"His name is Herbert Stroll. I thought of him, but ruled him out. The retirement records are just that, with no medical records included. Stroll would have no way of knowing your husband was highly allergic to bee stings."

"I suppose those men outside have come to arrest me?"

"That's correct, Mrs. Baxter. They're from Scotland Yard."

"I have nothing to fear. Bruce will never implicate me."

"He already has, Mrs. Baxter."

Later, at the theater, Laura Alcott asked, "How can I ever thank you?"

"I should thank you for saving my life," Rand said.

"You let me save it, so I could save my own, too."

"It wasn't quite like that."

"I feel as if it was. What can I do for you?"

He looked up at the great empty stage, where the lights were being turned off. "You could send me two tickets for opening night."

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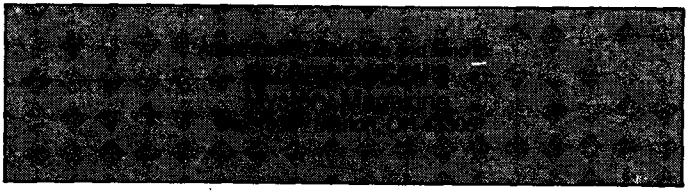

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a *NEW* Dan Kearny story by

JOE GORES

Patrick Michael O'Bannon—one of the best field men in the skip-tracing business—had eyes for nothing but that glorious red fire engine. His grandfather had remembered, from his *youth, San Francisco's great old volunteer departments with such names as the Lafayette Hook & Ladder, the Knickerbocker Hose Company, the Monumental Volunteers, and O'B as a child had chased such red gleaming trucks up and down the Mission District hills on his bike . . .*

FILE #11:
JUMP HER LIVELY, BOYS!

by JOE GORES

Patrick Michael O'Bannon was on his sixth cup of coffee in a coffee shop catchily titled The Coffee Shop, a phony rustic redwood affair ten minutes north of the Golden Gate Bridge. O'Bannon's eyes were sky-blue, his hair the color of carrot juice, his face a mass of freckles. He looked thirty-five and was ten years older, looked Irish and was, looked harmless and wasn't. Next to Kearny himself, O'B was the best investigator DKA had. Which was as good as there was.

When he wasn't hung over.

God, was he hung over. And despite his throbbing head and the heat building up outside, he had to *work* today. Case files unopened in several days. One especially.

The unincorporated area of Tamalara Valley was $2,455.80 delinquent on its new fire truck. What did you do with one like that . . . ?

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Dan Kearny sneezed. His icy grey eyes were bloodshot. He went around the massive blondewood desk in his soundproofed basement cubbyhole at Daniel Kearny Associates to retrieve the cigarette from where his sneeze had hurled it. DKA investigated most breaches of the Ten Commandments except those strictly theological, with special emphasis on recovery of wandering people, chattels, or assets for banks, bonding agents, corporations, and insurance companies.

Kearny blew his bent and flattened nose into his handkerchief. The middle of the sort of heat wave San Francisco was never supposed to get, especially in the summer, half the office staff out and Kearny himself feeling miserable, and here was O'Bannon off on a toot or some damned thing. No reports in *four* days.

He jabbed Giselle Marc's intercom button, unconsciously thrusting out his battering-ram jaw when she answered from her office upstairs.

"I told you two hours ago I wanted O'Bannon."

"He doesn't answer his radio, Dan."

"At home, sleeping it off?"

"He doesn't answer his phone, Dan."

Kearny cursed aloud. In mid-curse, he sneezed. His cigarette flew from his mouth to land on the far side of his desk.

The sun boiled and burned and throbbed and snarled down on O'B's pounding head from the cloudless Marin sky. Most of Tamalara Valley's houses hung from steep wooded hillsides, but the firehouse, a shedlike building painted an off-white with a wood-framed siren tower, was on a sleepy flatland residential street.

O'B, however, had eyes for nothing but that glorious red fire engine. His grandfather had remembered, from *his* youth, San Francisco's great old volunteer departments with such names as the Lafayette Hook & Ladder, the Knickerbocker Hose Company, the Monumental Volunteers, and O'B as a child had chased such red gleaming trucks up and down the Mission District hills on his bike. Two reels of red hose—*red!*—a grandly disdainful red flasher above the seats, another hose under the ladder racks . . .

"What are you doing, trooper? Raising *spiders?*"

O'Bannon froze. That voice! Those very words! Though more than a quarter century had passed since he last had heard them, he knew it had to be then Lieutenant Robert Stenger, U.S. Army.

Through the station's side door he could see a small shed with two military-style bunks. Flanking the bunks were two strained-looking

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young men in dark-blue uniforms, standing at rigid attention. Another couple of steps showed him a third man—mid-fifties and slight and pinch-faced and pink-skinned, like something left too long in the sun. He was just brushing the cobweb he'd found behind the radiator from the fingertips of his white gloves. His uniform was complete with jacket and gold insignia despite the scorching heat. He dropped abruptly to one knee and swiped a hand under the radiator.

"Look at this!" he yelled, waggling his smudged fingers under the cowering fireman's nose. "*Look at it!* How do you explain this filth under your radiator?"

"There *is* no explanation!" roared O'Bannon in a fair imitation of Stenger's voice. "Gig this soldier!"

Stenger whirled, bristling with outrage at the red-headed detective lounging against the door frame.

"Who the devil are you?"

"Patrick Michael O'Bannon. *The* Patrick Michael O'Bannon." He unfolded his arms and stepped forward. "Fort Ord. C Company. You were Company Commander and I was the soldier who always—"

"I remember you," snapped Fire Chief Stenger. His voice became almost a sing-song. "Undisciplined. Poor soldier. A hater of authority—"

O'B, who had been none of these but had had his fun all the same, proffered a DKA business card. "And now representing an agency representing Freuden Truck/Trailer Sales."

"Well?" glared Stenger. He was blinking rapidly, a mannerism O'B remembered from whenever Stenger's superior officers had chanced to be about. "You people have already made your sale to the Fire District. What more do you expect?"

"M-o-n-e-y." O'B leaned slightly forward. "Two payments of twelve hundred and six dollars and sixty-seven cents each, plus late charges of forty-two forty-six, plus DKA charges of one hundred seventy-five point seventy-five for a total of two thousand six hundred thirty-one dollars and fifty-five cents."

Stenger was aquiver with civil-service outrage. "This is an inexcusable—"

"It certainly is," agreed O'B.

"Only the governing body of Tamalara Fire District can authorize such a payment—which means the Fire Commission." His eyes gleamed in fanatical triumph. "Since the Commission meets on the

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twenty-fifth of each month, and today is the twenty-seventh, you'll have to wait."

O'B thrust a red-thatched, horrendously freckled face into Stenger's. O'B wore his jewelry-collector's smile. Jewelry collectors are the toughest there are, because they're usually told to go take the no-longer beloved's finger along with the unpaid-for ring. "You'd better convene 'em right away, reverend," he said.

"I'll do no such thing," snapped Stenger.

"Then you'd better pray for rain. Because if I don't get the money by tonight, your boys'll be walking to their next fire."

He tipped a wink at the two gaping young firemen and sauntered off into the shimmering midday heat.

Kearny felt his cold getting worse. Larry Ballard was taking off up the coast after abalone, leaving him a field man short over the last weekend of the month—always DKA's busiest time. Ken Harper, one of his best if not brightest car-hawks, was in Mission Emergency getting his head stitched up where an irate woman had beaned him with a three-pound can of coffee. And he still couldn't raise O'B on the radio.

He went up the interior stairs to the second floor of the old charcoal Victorian that had been a cathouse in its wayward youth and turned toward the front office which overlooked Golden Gate Avenue through grimy bay windows. Lanky, beautiful, brainy, and blonde Giselle Marc, who had taken over as office manager when Kathy Onoda had died at twenty-six of a CVA, was on the phone. She cast a guilty look at Kearny over her shoulder, so he quickly twitched the phone out of her hand and bawled into it. *"O'Bannon, where the hell are you and why the hell haven't you reported in?"*

"I am reporting in," said O'B's voice reasonably. "I'm in the field, working."

"In a gin mill, drinking."

"That, too. Listen, reverend, how tough am I getting on this fire engine over in Marin?"

Kearny, who was unfamiliar with the file but would never admit it, rasped like a nutmeg being grated, "You can read the instructions, can't you?"

" 'Collect full delinquency plus all charges or repossess.' "

"That's how tough you're getting. Now where—"

"Just asking, reverend," said O'B cheerfully and hung up.

One couldn't leave the area unprotected in case of fire, thought

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O'B as he slaked his thirst at the Fireside, a congenial place of assemblage beside Tamalara Valley's southbound freeway on-ramp. But Chief Stenger couldn't get away unscathed. O'B remembered too much excessive K.P., punitive grease-trap cleaning, weekend passes canceled without warning, endless company punishment under Article 19 of the Universal Military Code. It was twenty-five years ago, but honor demanded . . .

"Boss or Liar's?" demanded a familiar voice, and Deputy Sheriff Jock Mahoney's ham-sized hand clapped him on the shoulder as he took the next stool for a cooling brew before returning to duty.

The bartender slammed down the dice cups, rattling, in front of them. And O'B, who had begun to formulate a plan, remembered that the Sheriff's Department furnished Tam Valley with whatever law enforcement was needed. Lovely. Lovely indeed.

O'Bannon left the Fireside feeling marvelous. Jock owed him twenty bucks, his hangover was gone, the calming hush of evening was descending, and the air was cooling delightfully. He turned off Shoreline to peer through the soft warm dusk at the brightly lit frame building. A man who would white-glove a radiator doubtless would demand, as the heat of the day abated, a polished fire truck and a hosed-down concrete apron.

The still-dripping red engine was parked in a large puddle on the dirt shoulder of Poplar Street. O'B parked beyond, under a weeping willow's trailing fingers, locked his car, and strolled back to the gleaming truck. From the firehouse came the sounds of frenzied cleaning. He climbed up onto the broad leather seat and pocketed the ignition key. He slid lower to cock his feet on the polished dash, lit a cigarette, and stared up at the stars through the foliage arching the narrow street. When they came out to bring in their truck, they would find him waiting.

Chief Stenger bounced and yapped, stiff-legged, around the fire truck like a flea-plagued terrier. The sheriff's car cast a revolving red glow over the proceedings. O'B tried to tip Jock Mahoney a wink, but Mahoney would not meet his eye to avoid bursting out laughing.

"Arrest him for what?" Mahoney asked, not for the first time.

"For stealing government property!" exclaimed Stenger.

"The keys to a fire truck? Hey, chief, c'mon."

O'B condescended from his leather throne. "I am the legal representative of this truck's legal owner. It was parked on a public

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thoroughfare and I have taken possession until such time as the entire delinquency plus all costs shall be paid in cash."

That's when the siren started. There was a frozen instant of everyone looking at everyone else, then O'B rammed the keys into the ignition and switched on. Lights came on here and there around the truck. It fired up. He clapped the fireman's hat on the seat beside him firmly on his head. He gave the air horn a couple of tweaks. The two young firemen came running out, hastily pulling on their gear and gaping at O'B in astonishment. He waved his arm at them and remembered what his grandfather had said the foreman of the volunteer fire departments always yelled at their men. "Jump her lively, boys!"

They jumped her lively. The kid with the spiderwebs under his radiator yelled at O'B, "One of those redwood duplexes on Garden Way!"

"Get off that fire truck!" bawled Chief Stenger. He was jumping up and down in the street in impotent rage.

O'B barely heard him. He was thinking, out Marin to Northern, Northern to Glenwood, Glenwood to Eucalyptus, Eucalyptus to Garden. Got it! In his business, you couldn't find people if you couldn't find where they lived. He stood up behind the wheel and yelled at Mahoney, "Lead the way, Jocko me bhoy!"

Siren keening, Mahoney fishtailed away. O'B slammed the firetruck into gear and roared after him. Stenger, belatedly realizing he was being left behind, leaped for the rear of the truck. He missed. He landed face down, resplendent uniform and all, right where the truck had been an instant before. Right in the only mud puddle in Marin County.

Three hours later, O'B was seated at a table in the echoing Tamalara Valley Improvement Club hall just off Missouri Valley Road. It was one minute before two o'clock in the morning. His busy fingers were soot-smudged and ash was streaked down his freckled face under slightly singed red hair. He had burst into a ground-floor bedroom to find a three-year-old girl cowering, eyes like a terrified rabbit's . . . But there, he thought, faith and beJaysus, let the lads have the glory. We old veterans of many a roaring blaze take heroism as part of the job.

"Young man," broke in a heavy, authoritative, angry voice, "I demand to know how much longer this farce is—"

"Twenty-six hundred sixty-five," counted O'B loudly, "twenty-six

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hundred seventy-five, seventy-six, seventy-seven—you foul up my count and the charges go up again—seventy-eight, seventy-nine—they're already fifty bucks more than this morning—twenty-six hundred and eighty . . . "

He looked up at the ten stony eyes of the Tamalara Valley Fire Commission, met in emergency session an hour before.

"You come up a buck-fifty-five short," he told them.

The chairman, who happened to be president of First Marin Bank and Trust in his spare time, had a jaw even Kearny might have envied. But forty years of banking had taught him to control his temper. His hand went slowly into his pocket, brought out four pennies. His murderous eyes slid to the lady beside him. "Edna?"

Edna was rifling her purse. "I've got—um—sixty cents. Sixty-five—"

"Charles?"

"A quarter."

"Walter?"

"Ah, two quarters—"

"David?"

"Flat busted."

The gimlet eyes bored into O'B's. "We're eleven cents short. Perhaps you'll lower yourself to accept this."

"I bet the chief has it."

Stenger leaped as if bee-stung to grub in his mud-caked uniform pants for a dime and a penny. O'B signed the receipt with a flourish.

The banker's face was grim. "This does not end it, young man. Once I—"

"You're the president of a bank, aren't you, reverend?"

He went bone-white with rage, but managed to choke out, "That is correct."

O'B laid one of his DKA cards on the table in front of the chairman. "We do most of our work for banks. Give us a call."

Dan Kearny parked on Golden Gate where the tow-away had ended sixty seconds earlier. The fog was in, the heat was broken, but his head was still stuffed and his throat still scratchy. Yet and all, there were going to be some good moments to the day. O'Bannon was going to be reamed out as O'Bannon had never been reamed out before in too long a career of airy manners, doing things his own way, ignoring proper procedure, showing up at the office only when he felt like it, and never answering his radio calls. All because of

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the radio call Kearny himself had received on his way to the office this morning.

He had just sat down in his cubbyhole behind the blondewood desk and lit up his seventh cigarette of the day—a Kool because of his scratchy throat—when O'B traipsed in with a steaming cup of coffee in each hand. One he set down beside Kearny's ashtray.

"The Giants are at home today, Dan," he said brightly.

Manufactured fury glinted in Kearny's eyes as he thought of all of O'B's years of transgressions, but before he could say anything O'B broke in again.

"But I produce, Dan'l," he said, as if having picked Kearny's bitter complaints right out of his mind.

Kearny found a voice like a rock polisher at work. "Like you produced over in Marin County last night? I don't have all the details yet, but the president of the First Marin Bank and Trust was on the horn at *eight o'clock* this morning trying to reach me."

His intercom rang. He picked up and it was Jane Goldson, the perky English receptionist who handled set-ups and field-agent assignments in the front clerical office upstairs.

"I've got that bank president again, Dan. He's also the chairman of the Tamalara Fire Commission and apparently O'B repossessed a fire truck in Marin last night and drove it to a blaze. He insulted the fire chief, and then the Fire Commissioners, and made them convene in the middle of the night to pay the delin—"

"That bad, huh?" grinned Kearny. "O'B is right here—"

"That *good*. He wants to give us a couple of dozen assignments to work for his bank. He says he's never seen such aggressive field work by any investigator, and he says O'B saved a little girl's life and is going to be awarded a medal for heroism, and—"

"Give the call to Giselle," said Kearny hollowly.

He hung up, feeling like a very old man. O'B was on his feet. "I'm going to catch a steam bath before the game, Dan'l."

"O'Bannon, damn you, come back here to—"

But O'Bannon was gone. Kearny picked up his cigarette and stuck it between his lips. Instantly, he sneezed. The cigarette shot halfway across the room to land against the old, dry, very flammable wood of the baseboard. Cursing wearily, Kearny got to his feet and went around the desk to retrieve it.

His cold, he just knew, was going to get much, much worse.

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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Hobart's imagination went to work on Naomi Kent-Warfield. What was she up to? Surely photographic models were not selected in such a haphazard way. He had not been born yesterday. This woman who had invited him to pose was keeping something back . . .

THE RIGHT PHYSICAL TYPE

by WILLIAM BANKIER

A good-looking woman veered deliberately across the pavement to confront Hobart as he walked along Kensington High Street. He eased up and inclined his head politely.

"Do you own a suit?" she asked him.

On that rarest of English mornings—sunny and hot—Hobart was dressed in slacks and a T-shirt. "I own a three-piece dark-blue suit," he said. "Single-breasted. Cuffs on the trousers." Approaching, she had appeared middle-aged. Close up, the round face and innocent blue eyes could have been anything from eighteen to thirty.

"How would you like to do some photographic modeling?" she said.

"Are you joking?"

"A small job, one day's work. You're the right physical type." She held a brown cigarette close to her face as she spoke, the wrist bent gracefully, posing like a deb at a garden party.

"Let me buy you a coffee," he suggested. "You can tell me about it."

She became businesslike. "You know all you need to know." There was something buried in her handbag. She fished and found it—a business card. "Show up tomorrow morning at ten. Wearing the suit."

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Hobart watched her cruise down the street, pedestrians getting out of her way like swimmers in the path of a luxury liner. He glanced at the card. Naomi Kent-Warfield: no address, no telephone number, no job description. He turned the card over. Written on the reverse was an address in Covent Garden. Hobart knew the area, a district of warehouses left over from the old market, some of them converted to shops and offices.

With the card in his pocket, he walked across the road to sit on a bench in Kensington Gardens. He had his notebook with him, and his favorite pen. He began jotting down ideas for the crocopottamus book. The first couple of pages went well. His procedure was to flash out a drawing of one of his eccentric animals, then to begin printing the story in neat paragraphs wherever space allowed.

There was an element of danger in the new project. Up to this point, Hobart had only illustrated children's books written by established authors. Now here he was doing words and pictures on his own. Would he be able to see it through? If it didn't work, there would be no payday at the end of it. This was the essence of the freedom he had achieved when he left his salaried job at the art studio and went freelance—freedom to starve.

It was after he stopped working and walked across the park to a pub he liked on Bayswater Road that Hobart's imagination went to work on Naomi Kent-Warfield. What was she up to? Surely photographic models were not selected in such a haphazard way. He had not been born yesterday. This woman who had invited him to pose was keeping something back.

Finishing his pint of ale, Hobart made a decision. He went outside and leaped onto the back platform of a passing bus that drove past Marble Arch and along Oxford Street to a point where he could vault off and walk through Soho and down Charing Cross Road into the Covent Garden area.

He found the address, a former warehouse with doors flung open on a deserted entrance hall. Hobart went inside and discovered the place smelled of bananas and coffee.

He saw a stairway surmounted by a hand-lettered sign identifying the location of Clive Carrington, commercial photographer. There was a door at the far end of the hall. He went to it and knocked. Surprisingly, a peephole scraped open in the center panel and an eye observed him from the other side. The cover fell back in place and the door swung open.

"Morning, guv'nor."

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"Good morning." Hobart was facing a tall, stoop-shouldered man with a bald head and enlarged features. Years ago he had seen a wrestler billed as "The French Angel" who suffered from the same disease. This was a mild case, but still, even though the man wore a crumpled brown business suit, he resembled a giant out of Greek mythology. "I wonder if you could help me."

"Will if I can."

The scent of whisky explained the precautionary use of the peephole. "I've been invited to show up here tomorrow morning for something to do with photography. Do you know anything about it?"

The caretaker studied the business card. "This would be Carrington's young lady."

"The commercial photographer?"

"His studio is upstairs. I've seen him with a woman he calls Naomi. Big blonde?"

"That's the one."

"I don't know how they make a living. Drinking and partying all the time."

Hobart took back the card. "You've been a help. Thanks very much."

"I'm Archie Lucas. I open this place in the morning and lock it up at night. Do a little cleaning. Feel like a drink?"

"Actually, I wouldn't mind."

Lucas closed the door, found another chair, poured two drinks in mottled glasses, and sat himself down with an elbow on the corner of a desk stacked with rolls of paper towels and toilet tissue. "Modeling for the camera, is it?"

"So she said. She chose me on the street."

"Are you an actor, then?"

"No."

"I was once conscripted into a concert party in Burma. During the war. They were doing a show for us, within mortar range of the Japanese lines. They were brave, I give them that. A bloke went sick and they chose me to go on because I was the right size."

Hobart drank and nodded.

"Gave me a taste for the applause. I've been a member of a dramatic society in Hackney for years. They don't often give me a part, mostly I work backstage. But I've stayed away the last few months."

"Why?"

"Because my wife died not long ago. She was a member, too—helped

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with the costumes and looked after the catering. We always went along together. Now . . . "

"In my opinion," Hobart said, "you should stay involved. If you like to play parts, play parts."

"I'll take anything you care to offer me."

"You'll star in my next production."

Archie smiled and poured them each another drink.

It was another warm day. Hobart had both windows open in his bed-sitting room and still he felt sticky in his dark-blue three-piece suit. He studied himself in a full-length mirror and saw the man who used to sit down and talk to clients in the boardroom at the art studio. Same suit but a thinner man; fewer long lunches these days now that he was working for an insecure tyrant named Ted Hobart.

He walked to Gloucester Road underground station and boarded a Piccadilly Line train for Covent Garden. The rag-tag crowd of tourists and layabouts fell back and made way—such was the power of a white shirt and tie. Feeling the heat, he arrived at the former banana emporium and climbed the stairs to the studio of Clive Carrington, commercial photographer.

Archie Lucas was on his way down carrying a dustpan and broom.

"Where's the funeral?" he asked, giving the younger man the once-over.

"I'm about to find out," Hobart said.

Naomi Kent-Warfield was waiting in the studio. She was watching a thin-faced man load photographic equipment into a couple of Air France flight bags. "Off to Paris, then?" Hobart probed. "I thought we were going to take pictures."

They looked at each other. Then Carrington said: "This is the model you picked up off the street?"

Naomi's rejoinder was abrupt. "Let's go. My aunt won't wait all morning." She introduced the two men.

On the way downstairs, Hobart said: "If I'm the wrong man, I've got other things to do. This suit is a drag."

"The suit is lovely," Naomi said. "And you are the ideal man."

They drove in her car onto the Strand, through Trafalgar Square, under Admiralty Arch, along the Mall, past Buckingham Palace, and on into Chelsea, where they stopped in a street of large, fine houses near Sloane Square. Naomi had a key. They followed her inside into a gallery atmosphere of antique furniture and paintings

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that were the real thing. Even the furniture polish smelled expensive.

A tiny lady with ceramic skin met them in the sitting room. "Auntie, this is Mr. Hobart, who's going to model for us. I know you're wanted at the hospital. I'll lock up when we've finished."

Auntie examined Hobart's face for ancestry. "Are you going to want to eat?" she asked. "There's a bit of lamb."

"We're here to take pictures and then go," Naomi said. "Busy people, just like you, Auntie."

The old lady left by the front door and then Carrington got to work. He seemed to know what he was doing. Naomi helped him, shifting furniture, finding a book for Hobart to hold as a prop, using her comb to bring his hair down across his forehead. Snap, whizz, click went the camera as the automatic flash filled the room with light.

Breathing through his nose, Carrington switched lenses. "This is part of a series we're doing for *The Tatler*," he explained. "Some of the old interiors that aren't seen too often."

"They're tired of professional models," Naomi added. "They asked for fresh faces."

The telephone rang. Naomi left the room to answer. When she returned she said: "That was Tippi. She's over at the Admiral Codrington and she *must* see us about that nasty Porsche she wants to buy." She took Carrington by the hand and led him from the room. "Will you be all right? Don't answer the door—don't even answer the phone. We won't be more than half an hour."

It turned out to be almost twice that long, but Hobart didn't mind. He found a magazine and read, propped in a corner of a deep settee. Breathing easily, surrounded by wealth, his mind wandered and he slept. He awoke when he heard Naomi's roadster pulling into a parking space out front.

"Sorry to be so long—she insisted on buying us a drink. Now where were we?" The session ended more quickly than Hobart expected. By midday, Carrington had taken all the pictures he needed and began to pack his gear. Hobart was pleased when he saw Naomi counting out ten pound notes.

"We didn't discuss fee," she said. "Is fifty quid okay?"

"Fine." He put the cash in his pocket. If modeling could produce this kind of money in a morning, he wouldn't mind doing it twice a week.

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"Name and address here, please," she said, giving him paper and pen. "And telephone, in case we need you again, okay?"

"Okay indeed."

Hobart refused a lift. Instead, he did a bit of swaggering through the pubs of Chelsea, lording it about in his good suit with all that money folded away. By the time he arrived home, he was in a mood to be amused by his difficulty in fitting door key to lock. When the door finally swung open, he became aware that two men had followed him up the path and were standing behind him.

"Mr. Hobart?"

"Yes."

"We're police officers. May we have a few minutes of your time?"

The implication was that they might want several years of Hobart's time. He was driven to the station and was required to make a statement, which was taken down, signed, and witnessed. The only reason they didn't hold him in a cell was their inability to find the stolen jewelry after a thorough search of his premises.

"You've got rid of it the same day, then," the officer said.

"I never had any jewelry. It's the first I've heard of it."

"You were alone in the house for almost an hour. This has been established by Miss Kent-Warfield and Mr. Carrington. The diamonds were there when the lady of the house went out shortly after you arrived. When she returned this afternoon from performing her hospital charity work, they were gone. No sign of breaking and entering." The policeman's expression conveyed what he thought of someone who would steal from a decent old woman out doing hospital charity work. "Where did you unload it and how much did you get?"

They had to let him go eventually, but they advised him to stay in town. He might be charged at any time. He was dead sober when he arrived home for the second time. Drinking coffee and staring at the work in progress on his drawing board without seeing it, Hobart came to a swift and clear conclusion. Since he had not stolen Auntie's jewelry, it must have been Naomi and Clive. Which explained the unlikely business of his selection as a photographic model—they had set him up, deliberately left him alone in the house to have somebody to blame for their crime.

After an uneasy night, he went to the Covent Garden studio at nine-thirty in the morning. Archie Lucas was drinking tea in his cubbyhole off the entrance hall. He had news regarding Carrington and his blonde accomplice. "They've gone on vacation. Came back

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here yesterday afternoon in a great hurry, made a few telephone calls, then took off. Said they'd be back next month."

"Where did they go?"

"They didn't say." Archie poured a cup of tea and pushed it across the desk in Hobart's direction. "You look shattered, lad."

"They fitted me out," Hobart said. He downed the lukewarm drink in two swallows. "They stole her aunt's jewelry and made it look as if it was me." He told Archie the full story. At the end of it, the old man said:

"You'll be all right. Suspicion is one thing, but they can't do you for the crime when you didn't commit it. They have no evidence. They'd need to tie you up with the diamonds and you don't have them. Relax, old son."

"You must own a key to Carrington's studio, Archie. Let's go up there."

The caretaker hesitated.

"Let's take a look around. We may find out where they went."

Archie's expression became thoughtful as he sniffed the air. "I smell smoke," he said, reaching for a ring of keys. "That young photographer may have left a cigarette smoldering."

Everything in the studio was tidy. "No use searching for the diamonds," Hobart said. "If they did steal them, obviously they've gone somewhere to sell them."

"What are we looking for, then?" Archie's sense of responsibility kept him standing in the doorway while Hobart wandered about, peering at the desk, the files, the wastebasket.

"I don't know. Maybe this." He reached down inside the wicker basket.

"I emptied that yesterday morning after the three of you went out," Archie said.

"So this was discarded after they came back." Hobart uncrumpled a piece of scratch-pad paper and read what was written on it. "Hotel Classique, Rue St. Honoré."

"Sounds like Paris." The caretaker stared through the window as if he could see all the way to the Channel and across. "Haven't been in Paris since 1947. Spent a week's leave there the year before I was demobbed."

Hobart was eager to be off in pursuit, but he felt as if he could use some help. He had never been to Paris. "Come with me, then. We'll catch them with the goods."

"I could drink a bit of Pernod."

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"They'll be surprised to see us. They'll say or do something to trip themselves up."

"There was a waitress at a place called Le Beret Bleu . . . "

"You'll be my guest, Archie."

"No need for that. I saved up for a holiday with Ethel and we never took it."

Hobart picked up Carrington's telephone. "I'll book us on the hovercraft."

Standing outside the Hotel Classique, Hobart and Archie came to a snap decision. They would cross the road and check into the Pension Populaire. "We don't want them to see us until we're ready to be seen," Hobart said.

"Besides," Archie added, "it looks a pricey place and all."

Hobart soon discovered the contradictory qualities of a visit to Paris. The pension served the finest lunch he had ever tasted in a barren room populated by mechanics in overalls, each of whom sat behind his personal bottle of wine. This gourmet experience was balanced by the attitude of the staff, who clearly didn't care if he ever visited their city again.

Archie was impatient. He tossed back his coffee and brandy. "I think I'll just drop around to Le Beret Bleu." He got to his feet.

"She may not still be there," Hobart tried to warn him. Then he checked himself—why interfere with another man's dream? "On the other hand, she may."

When his friend went away, Hobart crossed the street and entered the lobby of the Hotel Classique. Here there was broadloom carpet, leather upholstery, crystal chandeliers. The desk clerk echoed and amplified the disinterest of the people who had just sold Hobart his lunch. Yes, they were registered here, Mr. and Mrs. Carrington. In room 743.

Hobart did not risk a call on the house phone. He rode the elevator to the seventh floor, found the room and knocked on the door. When Naomi opened up and saw him, she paid him the compliment of looking baffled. "You were right and I was wrong, Clive," she said over her shoulder. "He's traced us."

"You're quick off the mark," Carrington said as Hobart followed Naomi into a suite littered with the linen and silver of room service. "Have a glass of champagne."

"Why not," Hobart said.

"Why not indeed. Not every day do we come to Paris."

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"Nor every day," Hobart added, "do I get framed for a diamond robbery."

"Oh, that," Naomi said, falling onto the settee and throwing one large riding-school leg over the other. "You aren't bothered about that, are you?"

"Policemen at my door? A drive to the station in a car with a flashing blue light? A statement taken down and signed in the presence of investigating officers? Yes, I'm bothered."

"He's making rather a fuss," Carrington said.

"He'll be all right," Naomi said.

"He's got nothing to worry about really. We knew he would never go to jail."

"We just wanted somebody for Auntie to blame, to let us off the hook. I'm sure he appreciates that."

"Give him some money. Let him have a nice holiday."

"Keep your money!" Hobart exploded. Not since childhood had he been discussed in the third person while in the room as if he was too young or too stupid to speak for himself. "I've been made use of. Duped. Delivered over to the police as a cover for you two while you made off with the diamonds."

"Yes, but have you actually been done any harm?"

"That confirms it," Hobart raged. "What I've always suspected. Your privileged upbringing, minimal parental involvement, nannies, private schools—it's crippled your humanity. The pair of you are civilized psychopaths, you don't know how anybody else feels."

Naomi looked at her watch. She raised her eyebrows at Carrington. She abhorred this intense scene Hobart was making. "I'm sorry," she said. "If that's how you see it, there's nothing we can do."

"Nothing *you* can do, either," Carrington concluded.

It was midevening when Archie Lucas returned to the pension. He was drunk and sad. "She wasn't there," he said.

"I had my doubts," Hobart said.

"Nobody even knew her name."

"When did you meet her?"

"In '47. I stayed on in the service after Burma, after the war. Served a couple of years in the army of occupation. Leave in Paris was a big thing."

"A lot of water under the bridge since then."

The bony shoulders in the old brown suit settled into a slope of

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acceptance. "Probably married someplace. Kids of her own." He laughed at himself. "Grandchildren!"

"She thinks of you often," Hobart said.

"Would you say so?" Archie managed a pensive smile.

Hobart described his visit with Naomi and Carrington. Archie's pessimism returned. "No use accusing them. The police will say you're just trying to clear yourself."

"That's right. We need evidence. We must get hold of the diamonds."

"How do we do that?"

"I have an idea. They must have brought the stuff with them from England, probably intending to sell it here. I don't think they've had time to do a deal yet. So where do you keep a small fortune in gems when you're staying in a hotel?"

"Never in your room—the world is full of thieves," Archie said.

"Where else?"

"The hotel safe."

"Absolutely."

"But how do we get hold of them?"

"Not we, Archie—you." Hobart was beginning to sizzle. "Here's my plan."

There was no telling when Naomi would make her first appearance of the morning in the hotel lobby. So Hobart and Archie arrived early and found a sofa where they could watch the elevators and the stairs. Both were wearing the universal passport to public acceptance—white shirt and striped tie.

"Ready, Archie?"

"Scared to death. What if she dismisses me?"

"It couldn't matter less. Remember, this is Hackney Dramatic Society—your big chance to play the starring role. Your performance is not for her, it's for the audience."

"If you say so." Archie chewed a hangnail. "Who should I be, Spencer Tracy?"

At ten o'clock, Naomi and Carrington got out of an elevator and walked past the desk, where they dropped off their key. "Let them get farther away," Hobart said. As they left the desk, Naomi stopped to look at a display case and Carrington moved on through the revolving doors. "Perfect, she's alone. You're on, Archie."

The old soldier played the scene like a veteran, not just of Burma but of the National Theatre.

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"Naomi, darling, your mother said you might be coming to Paris! What a lovely surprise!" He embraced her and swung her off her feet. Archie's voice was booming, the staff was watching. Naomi was half smiling, trying to keep the scene quiet. She knew this was old Archie from Covent Garden. What was he on about?

Even Hobart believed this performance—the adoring grandfather taking advantage of an unexpected opportunity to entertain the apple of his eye.

"Don't say a word. I won't take no for an answer. Let me show you the real Paris. You'll be my guest at Le Beret Bleu."

The young lady, obviously embarrassed by this public display of affection, escaped at last through the revolving door while her grandfather, pink-faced and beaming, wandered off in the direction of the coffee shop. As he passed the reception desk, he blushed and shrugged at the clerk. "My granddaughter," he boasted.

Over café au lait and buttered croissants, Hobart stage-managed the second act. "Let half an hour go by, then approach the desk. How are you feeling?"

"Shattered."

"Just stay in character. You're in with a chance for an Academy Award. Best performance by an accomplice helping a victim balance the scales of justice."

"What if they haven't left a package in the safe?"

"Then you were misinformed. Apologize and walk away. But my hunch tells me it's there."

Hobart's hunch was correct. He monitored the encounter from a safe distance as Archie approached the desk. The clerk welcomed this extroverted old Englishman with a smile. *"Monsieur . . . "*

"My granddaughter wants me to collect the package she and her husband left in the safe. The Carringtons, room 743."

"Certainement, monsieur. Un instant, s'il vous plaît."

Outside a few minutes later, crossing the street on their way to the pension, Archie said: "He gave it to me. I can't believe it. He gave it to me."

Hobart was carrying the package, enjoying its substantial weight. "Why should he refuse? You're the lady's grandfather—he saw the two of you together."

They unwrapped the package in Hobart's room and spread Auntie's diamonds on the bed. There was a pendant, a bracelet, a necklace, a tiara—a cartoonist's ransom. "They put me on the hook," Hobart said, "for a very heavy crime indeed."

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Archie was frowning. "What do we do now?"

"Go home. Give these to the police."

"No, my son. Don't you see? Until now the police had only the accusation of those two villains to hold against you. They had no evidence because you did not have the stolen goods. But now . . . "

"Interesting," Hobart said. "Now I have the evidence in my possession and who would ever believe my story?" He went to look out the window and his face hardened. "Never mind, let's go home."

Three days later in London, working at his drawing board, Hobart got up to answer the telephone. It was Archie Lucas. "They're back. Carrington came in this morning. Naomi went up a few minutes ago. They didn't see me."

"Hang on, I'm coming down."

Hobart blew three quid on a taxi ride, he was that anxious to see the photographer and his lady friend. In Covent Garden, he found Archie standing guard in the front doorway. "They're still up there."

"Good. I'll have a word with them."

Archie followed him up the stairs. "You'll never persuade them to admit they took the stuff. It's your word against theirs."

"Stay tuned," Hobart said.

In the studio, Carrington got up fast when the two men came in. Naomi remained seated by the window.

"Let's not waste time," Hobart said. "I have the stolen diamonds now. Come with me and we'll tell the police all about it."

Nobody spoke until Naomi said at last: "It seems to me you have a problem. All the police need is a call from us and they'll find the stuff in your possession."

"What did I tell you?" Archie muttered.

Carrington decided to be confident. "She's right, you know," he piped. "But if you play it smart, we'll give you a share of the sale."

"You're giving me nothing," Hobart said, "except your arm as I conduct you to the police station."

"I think we should leave," Carrington said to Naomi and he made a move for the door. Hobart drew back, threw a right hand, and knocked the photographer against a filing cabinet. Naomi got up screaming.

"You'd better watch what you're doing!"

Hobart turned to her, grabbed her wrist, and drew her arm up sharply in a painful hammerlock. "I'm more than ready to break your arm," he said. Carrington came to Naomi's assistance. Hobart

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hit him on the jaw and this time the photographer went over on his back.

Archie Lucas was at the telephone requesting police assistance.

A couple of cars showed up within minutes and they all were given a free ride to the station.

It took the rest of the morning for the diamonds to be collected from Hobart's flat, for Auntie to be brought in for identification, and for all the statements to be taken. The officer in charge clearly believed Hobart, especially with Archie there to corroborate the Paris story and with Auntie making remarks about the useless piece of mischief her niece had turned out to be.

Set free in the afternoon, Hobart and Archie made it to a pub just before closing. They ordered doubles and stood in a garden doorway enjoying fresh air and a feeling of accomplishment. Auntie showed up moments later, clutching a large gin and tonic. "You ran away so fast," she said. "I wanted to thank you for rescuing my diamonds."

"My good name is what I was rescuing," Hobart said.

Archie was still shaking his head over the punch-up. "They didn't come quietly," he explained to Auntie. "My friend had to bash them about a bit. I thought he was gentle as a lamb, but he turned out to be a right physical type."

"Good," she said. "I hope he gave Naomi one for me."

The old man considered the situation. "Carrington won't be needing his office," he told Hobart. "Why don't you move in?"

"I can't afford the rent. Freelance cartoonists work at home."

"Rent?" Auntie queried, enjoying her drink. "Only immigrants pay rent. How about a five-year paid-up lease? It's the least I can do after what you've done for me."

The word came through the pub for last call. Hobart considered the ramifications of going to work every day in the stimulating hum of central London. Rent free. He could bring in a cot, abandon his expensive little bed-sitter. The cartoon book he was trying to produce would become a more practical project.

"It's a generous offer," he acknowledged. "I hardly know what to say."

"Say yes, thank you," Archie advised.

"Yes, thank you," Hobart said.

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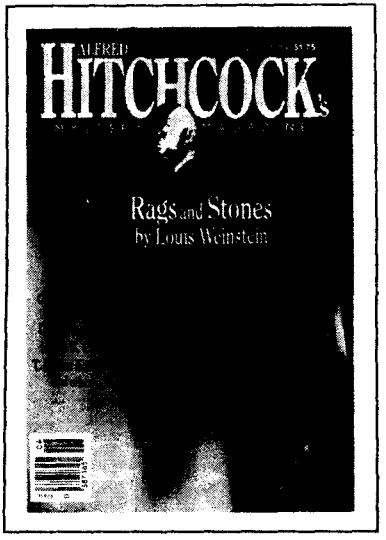

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a *NEW* Griswold story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

*Another tantalizing puzzle story told from Griswold's armchair at the Union Club, the forty-first in this sustaining series by Isaac Asimov. Dr. A., you may know, last year received a Hugo Award at the World Science Fiction Convention for best novel (*Foundation's Edge, *published by Doubleday). Not only that, but the winner of the Hugo for best nonfiction book was James Gunn's* Isaac Asimov: The Foundations of Science Fiction *(Oxford University Press).*

What will Asimov do for an encore? You know he'll think of something . . .

TRIPLY UNIQUE

by ISAAC ASIMOV

It had been a hot, muggy day, and the evening had brought little relief, but the library at the Union Club, shielded by heavy draperies and blessed with a high ceiling, was cool at the worst of times. With air-conditioning, of course, the horror outside became a quickly vanishing memory.

Jennings sat down with a sigh and lowered his tie so that he could open the top button of his shirt. He said, "How on earth did people survive before the days of air-conditioning? A few hours of that stuff outside and anyone could easily commit murder."

Baranov said sourly, "Then how is it that violent crimes are becoming increasingly common in these days of air-conditioning?"

"Because," I put in, "they take place for the most part in non-air-conditioned areas. In fact, if you stop to think about it, air-conditioning pumps heat out of an enclosed area into the street—the

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general urban environment. The rich get cooler and the poor get hotter."

"I happen to know," said Jennings, "that you live in an air-conditioned luxury apartment."

"Of course," I said. "I'm weak enough to take advantage of the injustices of society when those are in my favor, but that doesn't make them any the less unjust."

Baranov said, "I think it would be justifiable homicide to do away with self-righteous people who say one thing and do another."

Jennings said, "Let's choose for the privilege."

Baranov shook his head. "On the whole, let's not. As soon as the dead body was identified, you and I would be recognized as the obvious suspects."

I was about to make some cutting remark, with considerable contempt, and would have done so had not Griswold spoken up first. He had been sleeping peacefully in his armchair, I suppose, till the magic word "homicide" had roused him.

His eyes opened and his bushy white eyebrows moved upward as he said, "It isn't always easy to identify a corpse."

"I am very well known, Griswold," I said haughtily.

"Even so," said Griswold, "as I will now demonstrate."

Very few people [said Griswold] give much thought to what is meant by identifying a person. For the most part, what we actually identify is a face. It is the face that we study, and the face that we learn to think of as the person.

Consider how rarely we really look at any other part of a person with true attention. For one thing, people are usually clothed. And even if they are not clothed, as at the beach, good manners prevents us from staring. And even if we do stare, as at a young woman with satisfying esthetic properties, it is never with the kind of attention we give the minutiae of a face.

In fact, if we imagine a person with the face hidden, and if we imagine further that there is no unusual deformity or abnormality—no characteristic blotch or scar—we are likely to find it difficult to distinguish the nude body of a familiar friend from that of a total stranger. A lover or spouse might recognize a mole or small scar in a particular place, but there would never be the same certainty we would experience if we could see the face.

Nor could we find ourselves better off with modern science. There are two ways of identifying an individual scientifically. One is by

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the dental details—if one can find the individual's dental records—the other is by fingerprints, if these are on file.

Well, then, if the head is gone, there is nothing to be done with dentistry. If the hands are gone as well, there is nothing to be done with fingerprints.

This precise problem faced the police in a small town of a rural county within which I was injudiciously vacationing a number of years ago.

The story, to put it as succinctly as possible, is this—

A stranger had stopped at the town's only decent bar in the first weekend of July and had stayed there some time. He had chatted in desultory fashion with the bartender, who was the only other person in the bar and who was there only because he was preparing for the celebration after the celebration, so to speak. The bartender was busy and paid very little attention to what the stranger was saying.

A second stranger then entered, and the two men took their drinks to a table at the far end of the room. They behaved, the bartender said, as though they had arranged to meet there.

They drank their way through a moderate amount of liquor and engaged in a low-voiced but intense conversation that seemed to be an angry one. The bartender was still busy and heard nothing of what was said.

Eventually, they left together, faces glowering, and with every sign of an intensifying quarrel. They walked off in the direction of Noll's Hill, a rather desolate, sparsely wooded area, and as far as the bartender was concerned—and he was the only person to see them, apparently—that ended the matter.

The next morning, however, a young man, nearly speechless with horrified excitement, reported a body at Noll's Hill.

The part-time police officer, who represented the county force and who had never in his five-year tenure dealt with anything more than an occasional speeding violation, did the proper thing at once. He called the county seat and went off to locate the body and stand guard over it.

It was not entirely a body, however. It was, in fact, more like a torso. The head and the hands had been hacked off and were missing.

It was my misfortune that the county Lieutenant of Police knew me. I had vacationed in the area, we had met, and there was a mild friendship between us. He was puzzled and annoyed, and he came to consult me on the matter. Whether he knew of my expertise in

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such things I do not know, but he told me the story, and I said, "You think it was the men at the bar?"

"Yes," said the Lieutenant. "One of them is the torso and the other is the hacker."

"You can't really know that, can you?"

"No. But there's no male missing in town, and the torso is male. So it's a male from outside town. Those two men in the bar were the only two strangers reported yesterday and they were last seen heading for Noll's Hill in anger. It seems a reasonable inference that they quarreled there and that one killed the other."

"What else can you tell me about the torso? Anything?"

"It's that of an adult Caucasian of average measurements and coloring. The bartender can't really describe the two men, but he seems to recall that the man who arrived first had light-brown hair and the second man had black hair. From the color of the body hair, it seems likely it was the first man who was murdered and the second who was the murderer."

"And the murderer lingered at the scene of the crime in order to hack off the victim's head and hands? That was taking a chance, wasn't it?"

The Lieutenant said, "Everyone was down at the green yesterday, so Noll's Hill would be deserted. Under those conditions, the hacking could make sense. A head and hands are much easier to carry off and hide than an intact body would be. They can be hidden in three different places, and by the time they are found it might be difficult to show that they go together. Meanwhile, the torso can be left behind without any attempt at hiding it, for it would be just about useless to us since we can't identify it. Probably if we could identify the torso we'd be able to work out the identity of the murderer without trouble since there would be an overwhelming motive. As it is, we're in trouble."

"Somewhere," I said, "there's a man with blood on his clothes."

"I imagine so, though the hacking was done after death, so there wouldn't be an actual gush, you know. Still, who knows if anyone will notice that little thing, let alone report it, before he gets a chance to change his clothes."

"Somewhere," I said, "there's someone who's missing and who is the torso."

"Obviously, but we don't know where his home territory is, or how long it will take for someone to become aware of the fact that he's missing, or how long it will be after that before it will be reported

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that he's missing, or how long after that that any connection between the missing person and the torso will be made. And by that time—" He shrugged gloomily.

"But what can *I* do about it, Lieutenant?"

He said earnestly, "If I can come out with some crucial bit of information, some lead—even if in the end it doesn't help us—it will still look good on my record. And if it can help us, lead us to some solution, that would be magnificent. You understand that finding a torso is going to make a splash in the newspapers, statewide—maybe nationwide—and I'm the one on the griddle."

"And you want to show up as the clever sleuth."

"Wouldn't you?"

"Of course," I said, "but I still don't see how I can help you. I can't create a clue out of nothing."

"There is one little thing that I can't make head or tail out of, but maybe you can," said the Lieutenant. "The first man spoke to the bartender—"

"Ah, and what did he say?"

"Mostly nothing. Isn't it a hot day, and where is everybody, and it sure is a dead town—like that. The bartender wasn't listening much. He was hardened against small talk in bars and had the trick of saying, Uh huh, sure thing, ain't that something? —Do you know what I mean?"

"Absolutely," I said, with some feeling. "Every bartender I know is like that."

The Lieutenant said, "But the bartender did take note of one thing and that could be crucial. The stranger—this first man—who's probably the torso, said, 'I have the same name as one of those on the list. He was unique in three ways, you know. It's nice to have a triply unique name.' "

I said, "The bartender remembered that?"

The Lieutenant consulted a pad. "That's how it was reported. Word for word. Maybe the bartender doesn't remember it correctly, but he claims he does. He said he wondered at the time what a triply unique name might be."

"But he didn't ask."

"No. He said bartenders aren't supposed to be curious."

"Did the fellow actually say what his name was?"

"No such luck," said the Lieutenant gloomily. "But what did he mean by triply unique?"

"You mean you want me to tell you his name from what he said?"

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"Can you?"

I stared at him. I admit I know more and can see more clearly than the next fellow and I am used to having people expect miracles of me, but this seemed going a little far.

I said, "What was the list? The stranger said his name was one of those on the list. What list?"

The Lieutenant shrugged. "I don't know. The stranger never showed any list to the bartender. The bartender said he wanted to ask, but—"

"I know. Bartenders aren't supposed to be curious." I thought a bit. "Did the stranger have a newspaper in his possession?"

The Lieutenant leafed through his notebook. "It seems he did. The bartender says he used a newspaper to swat at a fly on the bar and knocked over a glass and chipped it. He'd remember something like that, of course."

"But he doesn't remember him reading the newspaper at the time he was making the statement?"

"He didn't say anything about that."

"Well," I said, "I'll take a chance. I'll tell you what I think the man's name is and you can carry on from there."

I told him the stranger's name and the reasoning behind it, and his gratitude was rather wearisome, even though I warned him it was far from being a sure thing.

But it was something for him to work with. The state police searched for anyone by that name who might be missing and one was eventually found. Assuming that *that* missing man was the torso, the identity of the killer seemed probable—and when he was picked up, the shock of being spotted so quickly seemed to break him.

It all worked out well. The Lieutenant received credit for a brilliant piece of deduction while I had the comfortable feeling of having done a good deed.

Griswold stared gloomily at his empty glass and set it down. He then leaned back and let his eyes close, but I said loudly, "Griswold, you've gone too far. It's impossible to tell a man's name on the basis of the information you've given us."

Griswold's eyes rolled upward in a dramatic pretense of appealing to heaven. He said, "You have all the information you need, or would have, if any of you had the intelligence of the average moron. I began the story by telling you it was the first weekend of July and

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I mentioned there being a celebration on the day the two strangers were in the bar, with everyone at the green. You might have deduced it was Independence Day.

"It is not unusual on Independence Day for newspapers to print facsimiles of the Declaration of Independence and the stranger had a newspaper with him. If, then, he said he bore the same name as one of the people on the list, wasn't it logical to assume that it was the name of one of the signers of the Declaration?"

Jennings said, "There are several dozen signers. Are you going to pretend you could pick out *the* one."

"There were fifty-six signers, as a matter of fact," said Griswold, "but the stranger said he shared the name of a signer who was triply unique."

"Well?" said Baranov. "I don't see how that helps."

"No? Well, there are probably dozens of ways, maybe hundreds, in which you could describe different signers as unique in different ways, but it seems fair to suppose that the uniqueness in question should be those that a man aware that he shared the name of one of the signers would appreciate as being unique. He wouldn't be impressed by the fact that a particular signer happened to be the only one born in a particular county, for instance."

"Go on," I demanded.

"If you just look at the signatures on a facsimile copy of the Declaration, you see at once that one is unique. When Charles Carroll approached to sign, someone said there were so many Charles Carrolls in Maryland, George III would have trouble identifying him when it came time to hang them all for treason. Whereupon Charles Carroll signed himself with the name of his estate, so that he would not seem to be hiding behind anonymity. He appears on the document as 'Charles Carroll of Carrollton'—the only signer who signs more than his bare name. That's unique, I think."

"What else?" I said.

"In addition," said Griswold, "Charles Carroll happens to be the only Catholic on the list. The other fifty-five were all Protestants. He was doubly unique."

"And?" I said.

"And Charles Carroll happens to be the last survivor of all the signers. He died in 1832, fifty-six years after the signing, at the age of ninety-five. Triply unique, wouldn't you say? So I suggested the murdered man was named Charles Carroll, and so he was."

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a ***NEW*** short story by

CLARK HOWARD

Once there had been sixty million plains buffalo. Their presence on the Northern Plains had been the greatest recorded aggregation of large land animals ever known to man. To the red man of the prairie, the vast herds had been the mainstay of his economy. That single species provided food, clothing, shelter, and medicine for an entire race—the only time in history that such a natural balance between man and beast had ever been achieved. And now there was only one.

Clark Howard again writing simply, sensitively, and superbly about a subject—and people—he knows very well . . .

THE PLATEAU

by CLARK HOWARD

Tank Sherman felt his daughter's hand shaking him gently. "Tank. Tank, wake up. Bruno's dead."

Tank sat up, moving his legs off the side of the cot where he had been napping, fully clothed except for his boots. Bruno? Bruno dead?

"You mean Hannah," he said, automatically reaching for his boots.

"No, Tank, I mean Bruno. Hannah's still alive. It's Bruno that died."

Tank frowned. That was not the way it was supposed to happen. He pushed first one foot, then the other, into black Atlas boots with riding heels. He had owned the boots for eighteen years, and they were as soft as glove leather. After he got them on, he sat staring at the floor, still confused. Bruno dead? How could that be? Bruno was supposed to have survived Hannah. Bruno was young; Hannah was old. And it was on Bruno that the lottery had been held.

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"What happened?" he asked Delia, his daughter.

"I don't know. Doc Lewis is on his way over to check him." She crossed the little one-room cabin to the stove and turned on a burner under the coffee pot. Getting out a cup, she poured a shot of peach brandy into it. "Will they still have the hunt, do you think? Since it's Hannah and not Bruno?"

"No," Tank said emphatically, "they couldn't. Hannah's too old. It wouldn't be a hunt; it would be a target shoot."

When the coffee was ready, Delia poured it in with the brandy and brought it to him. As he sipped it, Tank studied his daughter. She had the dark hair of her mother: thick and black as a crow's wing. And the high cheekbones of her mother's people, the Shoshone. Her light halfbreed coloring and blue eyes she got from him. All her life she had called him "Tank" instead of "Daddy." At nineteen, her body was round and strong. She lived in her own mobile home down the road, and dealt blackjack for a living in an illegal game behind the Custer's Last Stand restaurant. Tank himself still lived in the cabin where Delia had been born. He had been alone for a year, since Delia left; and lonely for six years, since her mother had died of bone disease.

"Are you going down to the concession?" Delia asked.

"In a minute." He held the coffee cup with both hands, as if warming his palms, and smiled at his daughter. "Remember how your Ma used to raise hell when she caught you lacing my coffee with brandy?"

"Yes." Delia smiled back.

"She always wanted me to make something of myself, your Ma. Always wanted me to do something important. But I guess it just isn't in the cards. If Hannah had died first, like she was supposed to, why, I could have done something important for the first time in my life. Important to your Ma, at least. And to Bruno. But Bruno ups and dies first, so I'm left with nothing important to do. If your Ma was still alive, she'd swear on her medicine bag that I arranged it this way."

Shaking his head wryly, Tank drank a long swallow from his cup. At fifty, he was a rangy, well worn man with not an ounce of fat on him. His face showed the results of a hundred fists, maybe more. Twenty years earlier he had come to town as part of a traveling boxing show, whites against Indians. Dan Sherman, his name had been, but they billed him as "Tank" because he was so tough. Tank Sherman, after the Sherman tank. A hide like armor. Took punches

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like Jake LaMotta. But he had taken too many by then. In their little Montana town, a Northern Cheyenne who hated whites had beaten him to a pulp, and when the outfit moved on it took the Northern Cheyenne with it and left Tank behind. Delia's mother had found him sitting behind the 7-Eleven, trying to eat some crackers and Vienna sausage he had bought with his last dollar. His lips were swollen so grotesquely he could barely chew, his eyes puffed to slits through which he could hardly see. Delia's mother took him home with her. They were never to part. Delia was their only child.

"Let's go on down to the concession," Tank said when he finished his coffee.

His cabin was on the slope of a low hill, and as Tank and Delia walked down its path they could see a small crowd already beginning to gather at the concession's corral. The concession itself was nothing more than a small barn next to the corral, with a gaudy red sign over its door which read: LAST TWO LIVING BUFFALO—ADMISSION $1. Tourists bought tickets and lined up around the corral, then the barn doors were opened and Bruno and Hannah were driven out to be viewed. They were the last two remaining buffalo in North America.

Now there was only one.

Old Doc Lewis, the reservation veterinarian from the nearby Crow agency, had just finished examining Bruno when Tank and Delia eased their way through the crowd to him.

"What killed him, Doc?" asked Tank, looking down at the great mass of animal spread out on the ground.

"Stroke," the vet said, brushing off his knees. "He was carrying too much weight. Must have been upwards of two thousand pounds."

Tank nodded. "Can't run off much fat in a corral," he observed.

Doc Lewis was making notes in a small book. "How old was he, do you know?"

"Nine," Tank said. "My wife helped deliver him." His scarred boxer's face saddened as he noticed his daughter reach out and pat the dead buffalo's massive head. Then he glanced over to a corner of the corral and saw Hannah, standing quietly, watching. Unlike Bruno, a young bull, Hannah was a cow and much older: at least thirty. She had thinner, lighter hair than most buffalo, and a triangular part of her neck and shoulder cape was almost blonde, indicating the presence somewhere in her ancestry of a white buffalo. Much smaller than Bruno, she stood only five feet at her shoulders and weighed a shade over seven hundred pounds.

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"I guess this means the big hunt is off, doesn't it, Doc?" Tank asked. It was the same question Delia had asked him, and Doc gave the same answer.

"Of course. There wouldn't be any sport at all going after Hannah. She's much too old."

The three of them walked over to Hannah and, as if compelled by some irresistible urge, they all patted her at once. "Well, old girl," Doc said, "you made the history books. The last North American plains buffalo."

"Maybe they'll put her on a stamp or something," said Delia.

"Maybe," Doc allowed. "They already had the buffalo on a nickel, but that was before your time."

From the barn, a pretty young woman in the tan uniform of a state park ranger walked over to them. White, educated, poised, she was everything Delia was not. "Hello, Dr. Lewis—Mr. Sherman," she said. "Hello there, Delia." She snapped a lead rein onto the collar Hannah wore. "I just got a call from headquarters to close down the concession. And to trim Hannah's hooves. Isn't it exciting?"

Doc and Tank exchanged surprised looks. "Isn't what exciting?" Doc asked, almost hesitantly. Instinctively, both he and Tank already knew what her answer would be.

"The hunt, of course. Oh, I know it won't be the same as it would have been with Bruno as the prey. But it will still be the last buffalo hunt ever. That's history in the making!"

"That," Doc rebuked, "is barbarism."

"Are you saying the hunt's still on?" Tank asked. "With Hannah as the prey?"

"Of course." She shrugged her pretty shoulders. "I mean, how else can it be? The tickets have been sold, the lottery has been held. You don't expect the state to go back on its word, do you?"

"No," Delia said, "definitely not. Never. Not the state."

"Well, there you are," the young ranger said, missing Delia's sarcasm entirely. "But, listen, they *have* changed the rules a little to make it fairer. Bruno was only going to be given a twelve-hour start, remember? Well, Hannah gets a full *twenty-four*." She smiled, apparently delighted by the allowance.

Doc Lewis turned and walked away, thoroughly disgusted. Tank and Delia left also. Walking back up the path to Tank's cabin, Delia said, "Looks like you're getting your chance to do something important, after all."

Tank, thinking about his dead wife, nodded. "Looks like . . ."

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When it had become clear that the plains buffalo had finally reached the threshold of extinction, when it was absolutely certain that no new calves would be born because the remaining cows were too old to conceive, the state had immediately done two things: penned up the few remaining members of the species and put an admission on their viewing, and devised a nationwide lottery to select the persons who would be allowed to hunt—and take the head and hide of—the last American buffalo.

Both moves proved enormously successful. The Last Remaining Buffalo concession, let by the state to one of its own departments, the Bureau of Parks, was open nine months of the year. Managed by park rangers, it operated under very low overhead and was the most profitable tourist attraction in the state. All around the corral where the buffalo were exhibited, there were coin-operated machines where for a quarter visitors could purchase cups of processed food pellets to toss into the corral for the buffalo to eat. Like peanuts to caged monkeys. Except that the buffalo refused to do tricks. Despite considerable effort in the beginning, including the use of a whip, the buffalo had remained stoic and refused to be trained. Finally, the park rangers had to resign themselves to simply leading their charges into the corral and letting them stand there while small children pelted them with synthetic food. The attraction, nevertheless, was popular.

As profitable as the concession was, however, its earnings were modest compared to the proceeds of the lottery. In a scheme devised by one of the General Accounting Office's young financial wizards, two million numbered tickets had been sold throughout the state and through the mail nationally, for five dollars a chance. The ticket supply was exhausted within a month, and the state had made a quick ten million dollars. Even people who had no interest whatever in hunting bought a ticket for investment speculation. Even before the drawing, advertisements had been run by people offering to buy a winning ticket from anyone whose number was picked.

The drawing, wherein three winners were selected, was by the use of a single, predesignated digit each day from the total shares traded on the New York Stock Exchange. The lucky ticket holders were a piano tuner from Boston, a waiter in Memphis, and a ranch hand in Nevada. The piano tuner sold his ticket for ten thousand dollars to Gregory Kingston, the actor. The waiter sold his for eighty-five hundred to bestselling author Harmon Langford. Lester Ash, the ranch hand, kept his, deciding that the head and hide would be

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worth far more than the ticket. He was counting on being a better hunter and shot than the actor and author were.

Within two hours of the untimely death of Bruno, the three registered owners of the winning tickets were notified to come claim their prize. Hannah, the last surviving plains buffalo, would be released fifty miles out on the prairie at noon on Friday.

At noon on Saturday, the three lottery winners would be free to hunt her.

By midnight on Thursday, Tank Sherman was ready to go. Hitched to the rear of his Ford pickup truck was a double-stall horse trailer from which he had removed the center divider, creating one large stall.

Parking the rig on the prairie some one hundred yards behind the concession corral, he and Delia slipped through the quiet night to the barn, snipped the padlock with bolt-cutters, and led Hannah out. The old buffalo cow was as docile as a rabbit and made no noise whatever as Delia fed her a handful of fresh meadow grass and Tank slipped a braided halter over her head.

After walking the buffalo aboard the trailer and quietly closing her in, Tank handed Delia an envelope. "Here's the deed to the cabin and lot. And the passbook to your ma's savings account. She had six hundred and forty dollars saved when she died; it was supposed to be yours when you were twenty-one. Oh, and the title to the pickup is there, too, just in case. Guess that's about all."

Delia got a paper bag and thermos jug from her Jeep. "Sandwiches," she said. "And coffee. With, uh—"

"Yeah." He put the bag and jug on the seat of the pickup and sniffed once as if he might be catching cold. But he wasn't catching cold. "Listen, take care of yourself, kid," he said brusquely, and started to get into the truck. Then he turned back. "Look, I know I ain't never won no Father-of-the-Year prize and I never gave you noplace to live but that cabin and I never sent you to college or nothing, but those things don't have nothing to do with caring. You understand?"

"Sure," Delia said. She shrugged. "After all, you did teach me when to fold in poker. And how to change a flat. And how to get a squirrel to eat out of my hand. Lots of girls never learn those things." She had to struggle to control her voice. She was not able to control her tears. But she knew that Tank couldn't see the tears in the darkness.

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"Okay," he said. "I'll be hitting the road then."

He eased the door of the pickup shut, quietly started the engine, and slowly pulled away without headlights.

Behind him, Delia waved in the darkness and said, "'Bye—Daddy."

When he reached the highway, turned on his headlights, and increased speed, Tank thought: *Okay, Rose, this is for you, honey.*

Rose was Tank's dead wife, the woman who had always wanted him to do something important. Her Shoshone name was Primrose, given to her by her father because she had been born on a day in early July when the evening primrose had just blossomed. Later, when she moved into town and took up the ways of the white woman, she shortened it to Rose.

Tank always remembered Rose as being beautiful, but she was not; she was not even pretty. Her face was very plain, her eyes set too close together, her nose too long, and one cheek was pitted with pockmarks. Only her hair, lustrous as polished onyx, could truly be called beautiful. But Tank saw so much more of her than was outside. He saw her hopes and dreams, her pride, her nakedness when they made love, her secret joys. He saw everything about her, and it was all of those things combined which made her beautiful to him.

The first time she had shown him the buffalo was three months after she had taken him to live with her, after she had nursed him back to health from the beating he had taken. They got up early one morning on Rose's day off from the sugar-beet processing plant, and in her old Jeep they drove thirty miles out onto the raw prairie. There, on an isolated meadow, was a small buffalo herd: three bulls, a cow, and six calves. They were the beginning of the last migration, when the ocean of tourists had started driving them north and west from the Black Hills.

"See how noble they look," Rose had said. "See the dignity with which they stand and observe." Her eyes had become water and she had added, "They are watching their world come to an end."

Once, Rose explained to him, there had been sixty *million* plains buffalo. Their presence on the Northern Plains had been the greatest recorded aggregation of large land animals ever known to man. To the red man of the prairie, the vast herds had been the mainstay of his economy. That single species provided food, clothing, shelter, and medicine for an entire race—the only time in history that such a natural balance between man and beast had ever been achieved.

"Then, of course, the whites came," Rose said. "At first, they killed

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the buffalo for meat and hides, as our people did, and that was acceptable because the herds were many. Later they killed them only for hides, leaving the carcasses to rot in the sun. Even that act, although it was without honor, could have been tolerated. But then they began killing them for what they called 'sport.' Fun. Recreation.

"They killed them first by the tens of thousands. The butcher Cody, whom they called 'Buffalo Bill,' personally recorded more than forty-two-thousand kills in one seventeen-month period. Soon they were being slaughtered with total wantonness, by the hundreds of thousands. Today there are only a few hundred left. Most of them are in the Black Hills. But they're slowly migrating back up here again."

"Why?" Tank asked, fascinated.

"They know the end is nearing for them. A species can tell when their breed is running out. Each year they see fewer and fewer calves, the herds become smaller and smaller. So they look for a place to end their line. They look for a grassy meadow unspoiled by humans. A place to lie down and die with dignity."

For all the years Tank Sherman knew and lived with the Shoshone woman Rose, she had loved the great buffalo and mourned its diminishing number. As much as Tank missed her in death, he was glad that she had not lived to see Bruno and Hannah, the last two of the breed, penned up and put on display—or known about the lottery for the privilege of hunting the survivor.

So this is for you, honey, he thought as he headed southeast with Hannah in the horse trailer. He would have about five hours head start. Possibly two hundred fifty miles. Maybe it would be enough.

Maybe not.

Two hours after dawn, a tall, very handsome man, livid with anger, was stalking back and forth in the empty concession corral.

"What the hell do you mean, *missing?* How can something as large as a buffalo be *missing?*" His name was Gregory Kingston. An Academy Award-winning actor, he was not acting now; he was truly incensed.

"The state guaranteed this hunt," said a second man. Smaller, plumper, not as handsome but with a good deal more bearing, this was Harmon Langford, internationally known bestselling author. Like Kingston, he was dressed in expensive hunting garb, carrying a fine, hand-tooled, engraved, foreign-made rifle. "Exactly who's in charge here?" he quietly demanded.

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A third man, Lester Ash, the ranch hand from Nevada, stood back a step, not speaking, but observing everything. He wore hardy working clothes: denim, twill, roughout leather.

"Gentlemen," a Bureau of Mines spokesman pleaded, "please believe me, we're trying to get to the bottom of this as quickly as we can. All we know right now is that some person or persons apparently abducted Hannah sometime during the night. The highway patrol has been notified and a statewide search is getting underway at this very moment—"

"Why in hell would anyone want to abduct a *buffalo?"* Kingston inquired loudly of the world at large, throwing his arms up in bewilderment. Now he *was* acting.

"Oh, come, Kingston," said Harmon Langford, "we're not talking about *a* buffalo, we're talking about *this* buffalo. Unlike ourselves, there *are* those—" and here he glanced at Lester Ash "—who are interested in this animal not for sport but for profit." Lester Ash grinned but remained silent. Langford continued, "At any rate, we cannot waste time on *why*—we must concentrate on *where. Where* is our great, hairy prize? And how do we get to it?"

The Bureau of Parks man said, "We should be hearing from the highway patrol any time now. Every road in the state is covered."

"What do we do now?" asked Gregory Kingston, directing the question at Langford.

"We must be prepared to get to the animal as quickly as possible after it's located," the author declared. "Before some outsider decides to take an illegal shot at it. This part of the country is crawling with would-be cowboys. Pickup trucks, rifle racks in the back window, old faded Levis—that sort of thing. I'm sure there are a few of them who would like to be remembered as the man who gunned down the last buffalo."

"Like you, you mean?" Lester Ash said, speaking for the first time.

A smirk settled on Langford's lips. "Yes," he acknowledged. Adding, "And you." They locked eyes in a moment of mutual understanding and then Langford said, "What we need, of course, is fast, flexible transportation." He turned to the Parks man. "How far is the nearest helicopter service?"

"Fifty miles."

"I suggest we start at once. If we have a helicopter at our disposal by the time the buffalo is located, we can hurry there at once. I presume the state would have no objection to that?"

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The Parks man shrugged. "Not so long as all three of you get an equal start. And don't shoot it from the air."

"Of course not. We aren't barbarians, after all." He looked at Kingston and Lester Ash. "Are we agreed?"

"Agreed," said the actor.

"Let's go," said Ash.

Three hours earlier, Tank had parked the pickup and trailer in a stand of elm and gone on foot deeper into the trees where Otter had his cabin. It had still been dark—the eerie void before dawn. He knocked softly at Otter's door.

"Who disturbs this weak old man at such an hour?" a voice asked from within. "Is it someone evil, come to take advantage of my helplessness?"

"Otter, it's Sherman," said Tank. "Your daughter's man before she passed."

"What is it you want?" asked Otter. "I am destitute and can offer you nothing. I have no money or other valuables. I barely exist from day to day. Why have you come to me?"

"For your wisdom, Otter. For your words."

"Perhaps I can give you that, although I am usually so weak from hunger that each breath could well be my last. How many others have you brought with you?"

Tank smiled in the darkness. "I am alone, Otter." Maybe now the old scoundrel would stop acting.

"You may enter," Otter said. "There are candles by the door."

Inside the front door, Tank lighted a candle that illuminated patches of an incredibly dirty and impoverished room. In one corner, an ancient cot with torn sagging mattress; in another, a rusted iron sink filled with dirty pots and pans; in a third, an old chifforobe with a broken door hanging loose to reveal a few articles of ragged clothing. Everywhere in between there was dirt, grime, clutter.

Tank didn't pause in the room. He lit his way directly to a door which led to a second room, and in that room he found Otter sitting up in a king-size bed, a cigar in his mouth, a bottle of whiskey at his side. As Tank closed the door behind him, the old Indian uncocked a double-barrel shotgun on the bed beside him and put it on the floor. "How are you, Soft Face?" he asked. The first time he had seen Tank, the young fighter's face had been beaten to pulp. Otter had called him "Soft Face" ever since.

"I'm okay," Tank said. "You look the same."

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The old Indian shrugged. "There is no reason for something perfect to change."

Tank grinned and glanced around the room. It was a self-contained little world, holding everything Otter needed or wanted for his personal comfort. Portable air-conditioner, color television, microwave oven, upright freezer, power generator, small bathroom in one corner, indoor hot tub and jacuzzi in another. "How's the bootlegging business?" Tank asked.

"My customers are loyal. I make ends meet." Otter got out of bed and put a Hopi blanket around his shoulders. "Is my granddaughter still dealing cards in the white man's game?"

"Yes."

"Does she cheat them when the opportunity presents itself?"

"Yes, if they are tourists."

Otter nodded in approval. "That is good. Even a half-Indian should cheat the whites whenever possible." At a two-burner hotplate, Otter set water to boil. "Sit here at the table," he said, "and tell me your problem."

Tank explained to the old Indian what he had done, and why. When he got to the part about Rose and her love for the buffalo, Otter's eyes became misty. When Tank stopped talking, Otter rose, poured coffee and brandy for them, and brought it to the table. "How can I help you?" he asked.

"I need a safe place to put the old buffalo. Someplace where she can live out her days in peace without fear of being hunted and shot. Someplace where she will be able to die quietly, like your daughter Primrose would want her to die."

Otter sipped his coffee and pondered the problem. Several times he shook his head, as if first considering, then dismissing, a possibility. Finally he tapped a forefinger on the table and said, "Do you remember the place where Ditch Creek runs beside Bear Mountain?"

"In the Black Hills?" said Tank. "Where you used to take us on picnics when Delia was a little girl?"

"That's the place. There's a grassy meadow far above Ditch Creek that belongs to the few remaining people of the Deerfield tribe. It's within the Black Hills National Park, but the federal government deeded it to the Deerfields because there was no road into it and they must have figured the tourists wouldn't be able to get to it anyway. The Deerfield use it for religious ceremonies—it's sacred ground to them. The buffalo would be protected once it got there.

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But there are only dirt paths leading up to the meadow. I don't know if the buffalo could climb it or not."

"How high is it?" Tank asked.

"About seven thousand feet. There's a gravel road to about six thousand, but the rest of the way would be on footpaths. It would have been better if you'd stolen a mountain goat—you never were very smart, Soft Face."

"Can you draw me a map?" Tank asked.

"Of course. I am a man of many talents."

Otter got paper and pencil and from memory sketched a map and gave it to Tank. It was daylight now and the two of them walked out to the horse trailer.

Tank backed Hannah out to exercise and feed her.

"She's a fine old buffalo," Otter observed. "Only your people would think of shooting her."

"Just because they're the same color doesn't mean they're my people," Tank replied.

Tank tethered the buffalo to a tree and returned to the cabin with Otter. The old Indian cooked breakfast and they ate together. Then it was time for Tank to leave. Otter walked back to the rig and helped him load Hannah. After Tank got in and started the truck, Otter put a hand on the door.

"In each man's life, there is a plateau," he said. "Every man reaches that plateau. He may be there for a day or a year, or only for a moment. But his time there is the meaning of his life. It is the reason the Great One put him here on earth. I think, Soft Face, that your plateau might be that grassy meadow above Ditch Creek." He touched Tank's shoulder. "Go with the wind, son."

Tank swallowed dryly, nodded, and drove off.

The helicopter was flying a checkerboard search pattern two hundred miles from where the buffalo had been stolen. Harmon Langford sat next to the pilot. Gregory Kingston and Lester Ash occupied jumpseats behind them. All three men scanned the ground below with binoculars.

"This is maddening," Kingston muttered. He tapped Langford on the shoulder. "Tell me again!" he yelled through the noise of the rotor. "Why are we looking in this direction?"

The author yelled back, "The highway patrol reported that a pickup truck pulling a horse trailer filled up with gas in Dayton at four o'clock this morning! The station attendant said the animal in

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the trailer had a blanket over it and the man driving the truck said it was a rodeo bull! But he thinks it was our buffalo! They were headed toward Gillette! We're searching the area south of Gillette!"

The actor shrugged, as if it were all totally meaningless to him. Lester Ash leaned close to his ear and said, "Highway Patrol thinks he might be headed toward Thunder Basin! That's a big grassland area! Be a perfect place to set a buffalo loose!"

"I see!" Kingston said, smiling. "Now *that* makes sense!" He patted Ash fondly on the knee. Ash drew back suspiciously.

The helicopter continued to checkerboard, its pilot crossing out squares on a plot map on the console. They flew well into the grasslands, twenty miles deep, and began a random searching pattern, following shadows, wind movement, wild game—anything that attracted their attention. But they didn't find what they were looking for.

After an hour, the pilot advised Langford, "We'll have to land for fuel soon."

No sooner had he spoken, they received a radio message from the Parks man back at the concession. "The trailer has been sighted by a Civil Air Patrol scout plane. It's on Route 16, south of Osage, heading toward the Black Hills. It's sure to make it across the state line, so we're requesting the South Dakota state police to set up roadblocks. I'll keep you advised."

"How far is Osage?" Langford asked the pilot.

"Fifty miles, give or take."

"Can we make it?"

"Yessir, but that'll be the limit. We'll have to refuel in Osage."

"Go," Harmon Langford ordered.

Tank had his CB tuned to the law-enforcement band, so he heard the South Dakota state police order go out for roadblocks. They were being set up in Custer, Four Corners, and at the junction of Routes 85 and 16. Pulling onto the shoulder of the road, Tank shifted to neutral and unfolded a map he'd picked up at a service station near Sundance, where Otter lived. When he'd stopped at the station, the tarp flaps on the trailer had been down so no one could see inside. He was sure it hadn't been the station attendant who put the law on him. Probably that low-flying two-seater that had come in over him outside Osage.

Studying the map, Tank saw that the locations selected for the roadblocks gave him considerably more leeway than he had ex-

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pected. Apparently they thought he was going to try to drive well into the Black Hills. He wasn't. He needed to penetrate them only a few miles before reaching a secondary road that ran north and then east to Ditch Creek. Smiling, he saw that he would reach all three roadblocks. Getting out of the truck for a moment, he lifted one of the trailer flaps and reached in to pat Hannah's thick, hairy cape.

"We're going to beat the sons of bitches, old girl," he said happily.

It hadn't occurred to him that they might use a helicopter.

At Osage, Harmon Langford conferred by telephone with the authorities responsible for the roadblock. "Of course, I very much appreciate your help in containing this man, Captain, and I assure you that when I write about this incident, you and your men will be prominently featured. Now if you'd just be good enough to keep your forces in place and let my associates and me handle it from here, I think justice will be properly served. We really don't consider this a criminal matter. It's more mischief than anything else—a nuisance, but we can handle it."

Then he talked with the pilot of the scout plane. "Are you keeping him in sight?"

"Yes, Mr. Langford. He's moving up a secondary road toward a place called Ditch Creek."

"Fine. Keep circling and don't lose him. We'll be airborne again in a few minutes and should be there shortly. Of course, I'll expect to see you after this is all over, for photographs and such. Over and out."

As Langford turned to face them, Kingston and Lester Ash saw a look of gleeful triumph on his face. Almost an evil look.

"In a very short while, gentlemen," he said, "we should be in position to take our buffalo back. I trust both of you are prepared to deal with this abductor if he resists us?"

Kingston frowned. "What do you mean?"

Langford did not answer. Instead, he picked up his rifle and jacked a round into the chamber.

Watching him, Lester Ash smiled.

Turning off the secondary road into the inclining gravel road, Tank was aware that the patrol plane was following him. But he wasn't overly concerned. The two men in the light plane couldn't get to him. There was noplace in the surrounding hills they could land.

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All they could do was radio his position and he was too close to his goal now for that to matter. He knew where the roadblocks were—no one from there could catch up with him. Only one obstacle remained in his way: the thousand feet of footpath from the end of the gravel road up to the meadow.

Frowning, he wondered if old Hannah was going to be able to make it. A lot would depend on how steep the trail was and what kind of footing it offered. Good dirt footing was what he hoped for—Hannah's freshly trimmed hooves would slide too much on rock.

At the end of the gravel road, Tank drove the rig as far into the trees as he could. Part of the trailer still stuck out and he knew it could be seen from the air. No matter, he thought, they can't catch us now.

"Come on, old girl," he said as he backed Hannah out of the trailer and rubbed her neck. Studying the terrain above them, he selected the least steep path he could find and gently pulled Hannah onto it. Moving about four feet ahead of her, he drew the halter rope tight and urged her forward. She stepped nimbly up the trail and followed him without resistance.

This might be easier than I thought, Tank told himself hopefully.

The helicopter rendezvoused with the scout plane an hour after Tank and Hannah began their climb.

"Where are they?" Langford asked the air-patrol pilot on the radio.

"In those trees on the side of the mountain, sir. You can't see them right now because of the overgrowth. They're probably about halfway up to that grassy meadow on the plateau there."

Langford praised the two men in the plane for exemplary work, dismissed them, and turned to the helicopter pilot. "Set down on that grassy meadow," he ordered.

"I can't do that, sir," said the pilot, who was half Nez Perce. "That's sacred land belonging to the Deerfield tribe. Outsiders aren't permitted there."

Langford shifted the barrel of his rifle until it pointed toward the pilot. "I really do want you to land," he said pointedly.

The Nez Perce smiled. "I'd be careful with that rifle if I were you, sir. Unless you or your friends know how to fly one of these babies. They go down mighty fast."

Pursing his lips, Langford shifted the barrel back. He reached into his pocket, extracted a roll of currency, and peeled off five one-

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hundred-dollar bills. "If you could just hover a few feet from the ground. Long enough for us to drop off."

"That," the pilot said, taking the money, "I can do."

The last few hundred feet were the worst for both the man and the buffalo. The trail, after an easy beginning, had become narrow, steep, rutted, and treacherous. Three times, Hannah's hooves slipped on loose rocks or concealed roots and she went sliding back fifteen or twenty feet, dragging Tank with her. Each time, she rolled over onto her side and mooed anxiously as dirt from above displaced and shifted down to half bury her. Each time, Tank had to stroke and soothe her, help her dig out and regain her balance and patiently urge her forward again.

Twice Tank himself slipped badly, the leather of his old boots reacting just as Hannah's hooves did to the hostile ground under them. The first time he fell, his left foot came out from under him and he pitched onto both knees, puncturing one trouser leg on a sharp rock and cutting his knee badly enough to bleed. The second time, he lost his balance completely and went plunging downhill, sliding helplessly past Hannah, his face, shirt, and boots catching the avalanche of loose dirt that followed him. He had the presence of mind to let go of the halter rope, and didn't upset Hannah with his spill, but he slid all of forty feet. When he straightened himself, he was filthy with dirt stuck to his sweaty clothes and body and his face and hands showed nicks and cuts seeping blood through the dirt. Cursing mightily, Tank clawed his way back up to where Hannah, watching him curiously, waited with infinite patience.

Late in the climb, perhaps two hundred feet from the plateau, Tank thought he heard the roar of a motor. It was hard to tell with the thick treetops insulating the ground from noise and the constant wind whipping about now that they were so high. Maybe it was that light plane coming in low to search the meadow. If so, he thought craftily, they would find nothing there.

We're beating them, Rose—Hannah and me. And it's important that we beat them. Important that we make that plateau.

They kept climbing, the man and the buffalo, struggling against the total environment around them—the height aloof above them, the ground resistant under them, the air thin and selfish, the dirt and dust, the rocks and roots. Blood and sweat burned their eyes, both of them, for Hannah now had cuts on her old face as well. Foam coated her lips, saliva and tears wet the man's cheeks.

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They climbed until their muscles came close to locking, their lungs close to bursting, their hearts close to breaking. With no resource left but blind courage, they climbed.

Finally, they made it to the top and together crawled onto the edge of the grassy meadow.

The three hunters were waiting there for them.

Only when he saw the hunters did Tank Sherman realize that the motor roar he heard had not been the scout plane but a helicopter. As he and the buffalo struggled together to drag their bodies over the lip of the plateau, both had fallen onto their knees, Tank pitching forward so that he was on all fours, Hannah with her front legs bent, great head down. Both were panting, trying to suck enough oxygen out of the thin air to cool lungs that felt as if they had been singed. For one brief instant, as they knelt side by side, Tank's shoulder brushing Hannah's neck, both their heads hung, as if man and beast were one.

Then Tank looked up and saw the hunters. They stood in a row, the sun reflecting on their rifles.

"No," he said softly, shaking his head. "No," a little louder as he got to his feet. "No!" he yelled as he walked toward them.

Harmon Langford, standing in the middle, said, "Stop where you are—come any closer and we'll shoot!"

Eyes fixed like a madman, jaw clenched like a vise, his big fists closed, Tank stalked toward them. "No!" he kept shouting. "No! No! No!"

"You've been warned!" snapped Langford.

Tank kept coming.

"All right, shoot him!" Langford ordered, shouldering his own rifle and aiming.

No shots were fired. Langford lowered his rifle and looked frantically from Kingston to Lester Ash. "Shoot! Why don't you shoot?"

"Why don't you?" Lester Ash asked evenly.

Langford didn't have time to reply. Tank reached him, snatched the rifle from his hands, and hurled it away. Then he drove a crushing right fist into Langford's face, smashing his nose and lips, sending him reeling back in shock.

As Langford fell, Tank turned on Gregory Kingston. "Now just a minute," the actor pleaded, "I had no intention of shooting you—" He threw down the rifle as evidence of his sincerity, but that didn't deter Tank. The old fighter dug a solid right fist deep into Kingston's

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midsection and the actor folded up like a suitcase, the color draining from his face, his eyes bulging. Dropping to his knees, he pitched forward onto his face, the juicy meadow grass staining it green.

When Tank looked for the third man, he found that Lester Ash, experienced hunter that he was, had flanked his adversary and moved around behind him. It was now Tank standing on the meadow, Lester Ash facing him with his back to the sun.

"We can do it the easy way or the hard way, bud," said Lester. "Either way, that buffalo's mine."

Tank shook his head. "No." He moved toward Ash.

"I ain't no loud-mouthed writer or sissy actor, bud," the Nevadan said. "Mess with me and I'll put you in the hospital. That buff is *mine!*"

"No." Tank kept coming.

"Please yourself," Lester said disgustedly. He snapped the rifle to his shoulder and fired.

The round ripped all the way through the fleshy part of Tank's left thigh and knocked him off his feet. Instincts two decades old still lived in his mind, and as if someone were counting ten over him Tank rolled over and got back up. Clutching his thigh, he limped toward Ash.

"You're a damned fool, bud," said Lester Ash. He fired again.

The second slug tore a hole in Tank's right thigh and he was again spun to the ground. He moaned aloud, involuntarily, and sat up, one hand on each wound. Pain seared his body, hot and relentless, and he began to choke, cough, and cry. I'm done for, he thought.

Then at his feet he saw something white and yellow. Pawing the tears from his eyes, he managed to focus. It was a clump of wildflowers—white petals with yellow nectaries. Primroses.

Tank dragged himself up one last time. He started forward again, weaving and faltering like a drunk man. His eyes fixed on Lester Ash and held.

"Okay, bud," said Lester, "now you lose a kneecap—"

Before Lester could fire, Hannah charged. Massive head down, hooves almost soundless on the thick meadow grass, she was upon Lester Ash before he realized it. Catching him from the left side, her broad forehead drove into his chest, crushing his left rib cage, collapsing the lung beneath it. With his body half bent over her face, Hannah propelled him to the edge of the plateau and hurled him over the side.

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Lester Ash screamed as his body ricocheted off the first three trees, then was silent for the rest of the way down.

The Deerfield tribe marshal and his deputy, who rode up to the meadow on horseback at the first sound of gunfire, secured the area and arranged for Harmon Langford and Gregory Kingston to be escorted down to the reservation boundary. They were released with a stern warning never to violate Deerfield land again. Some men with a rescue stretcher retrieved Lester Ash's body. His death was officially attributed to an accidental fall from the plateau.

A Deerfield medicine man named Alzada, who resided in a lodge back in the trees next to the meadow, was consulted by the marshal as to the disposition of the buffalo.

"If the Great One put the buffalo here," Alzada decreed, "then the buffalo must be sacred. It shall be allowed to graze on the sacred meadow until the Great One summons it back."

The marshal looked over at the edge of the meadow where Tank sat under a tree, exhausted and bleeding. "What about the man?"

"What man?" said Alzada. "I see no man. I see only a sacred buffalo, grazing contentedly. If you see something else, perhaps it is a spirit."

The marshal shook his head. "If Alzada sees nothing, then I see nothing. Only Alzada can see spirits."

The marshal and his deputy rode back down the mountain.

When they were gone, the medicine man went over and helped Tank into the trees to his lodge.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

MYSTERY MAGAZINES: The mystery genre has lagged far behind science fiction in documenting the publication history and importance of magazines in the field. Happily, Michael L. Cook's 795-page volume *Mystery, Detective, and Espionage Magazines* ($65.00 from Greenwood Press, Box 5007, Westport, CT 06881) fills the gap nicely. It includes profiles of some 300 American, British, and Canadian magazines—past and present—with briefer coverage of foreign-language publications. Not surprisingly, the longest entry (nearly ten pages) is devoted to *EQMM*. The entries are written by specialists in the field, and especially knowledgeable are those contributed by authors and editors like Michael Avallone, Peter E. Blau, Herbert Harris, Robert A. W. Lowndes, and Francis M. Nevins, Jr. (Avallone reveals he was the uncredited editor of several magazines in the late 1950s.)

The book also covers mystery fanzines, providing useful information about DAPA-EM, the amateur press group, and various Sherlockian publications. A special section on book clubs is included, and appendices cover such topics as Golden Age pulp writers and true-detective magazines. Along with Cook's previously published checklist and index, *Monthly Murders* (Greenwood, $49.95), the book is an invaluable guide that belongs on the shelf of everyone interested in the mystery short story.

From Bowling Green University Popular Press come three more results of Cook's skill as a researcher and indexer. *Mystery Fanfare* ($12.95 paper, $21.95 cloth) is a composite annotated index of mystery and related fanzines from 1963 through 1981. *Dime Novel Roundup* ($6.95 paper, $12.95 cloth) is an annotated index, 1931–1981, to a popular fanzine in the dime-novel field. And *Murder By Mail* ($7.95 paper, $15.95 cloth) is an enlarged and updated edition of Cook's valuable 1979 bibliography of mystery book clubs.

CHRISTIE FOREVER: Though the popularity of mystery writers sometimes fades after their death, Agatha Christie's books seem even

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more in demand today than they were prior to her death in 1976. Bantam Books has launched The Agatha Christie Mystery Collection, bringing together all 79 of her novels and short-story collections in a hardcover set being sold by mail order. Berkley Books is offering new editions of 35 Christie titles in paperback. And *The Agatha Christie Companion* by Dennis Sanders and Len Lovallo (Delacorte Press, $19.95) is the eighth or ninth guide to her life and work to appear in as many years. It's also the most complete, covering novels, individual short stories, plays, and films in great detail.

S.F. & L.A.: Readers who wonder what San Francisco and Los Angeles looked like in the days of Hammett and Chandler are directed to two new books. A handsome edition of Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (North Point Press, $20.00) is illustrated with 47 historic photographs of San Francisco in the late 1920s. And Edward Thorpe's *Chandlertown* (St. Martin's Press, $12.95) is an illustrated recreation of the Los Angeles of Philip Marlowe.

FANZINE: Stephen Wright's Mystery Notebook is a quarterly 12-page newsletter on mystery news and reviews. The first issue features long essays on James M. Cain and Somerset Maugham. Subscription is $9.95 for four issues, $2.50 for a single copy, from Stephen Wright's Mystery Notebook, PO Box 1341, FDR Station, New York, NY 10150. Make checks payable to Stephen Wright.

99 BEST: Anthony Burgess's recent book *Ninety-Nine Novels* (Summit Books, $14.95), discussing his choices of the best novels published since 1939, includes brief essays on Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye,* Ian Fleming's *Goldfinger,* and Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* and *The Heart of the Matter.*

BOOKSHOP: Atlanta has a new source for mystery and fantasy books with the recent opening of the Science Fiction & Mystery Book Shop Ltd., 752½ N. Highland Avenue NE, Atlanta, GA 30306.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Due this month from William Targ, publisher of fine editions, is *Whodunit,* a brief "biblio-bio-anecdotal memoir" of Frederic Dannay written by Eleanor Sullivan, his successor as editor of *EQMM.* The edition is limited to 250 copies, signed by Miss Sullivan, priced at $90.00. It's available from William Targ, 101 West 12th Street, New York, NY 10011.

Coming in July from Walker is *Death in Donegal Bay,* a new Brock Callahan novel by William Campbell Gault.

St. Martin's Press has a unique double-header in June: Elliott Roosevelt's *Murder and the First Lady,* with his mother Eleanor playing detective, and Stuart Kaminsky's *The Fala Factor,* in which Eleanor Roosevelt hires detective Toby Peters to find FDR's missing dog.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Two deliciously different new films humorously invade the mystery genre on local screens currently—one a Hitchcockian dish simmered in a French sauce, the other a murder plotted to symphonic music. *Confidentially Yours* and *Unfaithfully Yours* have by coincidence similar titles, but each stands out individually as single servings of malevolent fun.

Confidentially Yours starts out grim: near a marshy duck shoot somewhere in the south of France a killer stalks an unwary hunter-turned-prey, who soon has his head blown away. The first murder. We immediately turn our attention to the domestic strife of a testy, frayed businessman (Jean-Louis Trintignant) and his blonde temptress wife. *We* know the husband had earlier been on the marshlands (leaving his fingerprints all over the murder victim's car!), *he* knows that his wife has been the dead man's lover. Very soon after a bout of upper-middle-class quarreling, the wife is brutally killed and the husband in short order suspected of it. But you've already guessed that. Enter plucky secretary (Fanny Ardant), whose devotion to her employer extends to risking her life down dark streets and in strange towns to clear him of a murder charge.

This cheeky Paris import (subtitled) was directed and written by the distinguished François Truffaut (based on Charles Williams' *The Long Saturday Night),* who has never concealed his passion for Alfred Hitchcock. Although Truffaut did not earn his international reputation on mystery films—his first two motion pictures were *400 Blows* and *Shoot the Piano Player*—he did French versions of Cornell Woolrich's *The Bride Wore Black* and *Mississippi Mermaid* (from *Waltz into Darkness),* and his coffee-table book drawn from interviews with Hitchcock reflects both his solid journalistic background and adulation for the Hitchcockian style. *Confidentially Yours* glitters with this style, and while the mystery itself isn't much, the unraveling of it is superb, sheer homage. The eccentric passersby, the erotic subtextures, the sudden twists and sardonic incidents are all stolen expertly and with love. Most delightful of all, however, is the Hitchcockian heroine, transferred intact. High-spirited, dauntless, Ardant suggests the shades of Hitchcock heroines from Nova Pilbeam (who was on a similar mission in *Young and Innocent)* and Margaret Lockwood to every Grace Kelly role.

Actually, Ardant had worked with Truffaut in a television film, and someone suggested to the director that the actress looked "like the heroine of a film *noir.*" In-

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spired, Truffaut reread Charles Williams to find a story about "an investigation led by a woman, not a murderess and not a woman detective, but a valiant secretary determined to prove the innocence of her boss." This relationship he could infuse with all the wry, sophisticated Hitchcockian touches, all the familiar set-pieces and themes—blackmail, chases, transoms, clues, plus a final-scene church wedding which bursts with fun and surprise. Energetic, madcap, Truffaut's *Confidentially Yours* is a treat which should not be kept a secret.

Wife-murder is the compelling subject of *Unfaithfully Yours* as well. Dudley Moore is a prime-years symphonic conductor who has taken himself a very young wife (played by Nastassja Kinski, who has portrayed a whole range of mysterious females from Dennis Wheatley's *To the Devil a Daughter* to *The Cat People*). Her youth and passion prove a curse as well as a joy. The conductor is beset with middle-age jealousy, and when a private detective's erroneous report claims infidelity has taken place, our hero wildly conjures murder—a vengeful, intricate murder which will implicate the young violinist who is the girl's supposed lover.

We see the death-plot acted out twice—first as it is cunningly conceived in Moore's fevered brain (while conducting Tchaikovsky, no less), and how finally it is clumsily, catastrophically brought to reality. The situation is based on a 1948 film by the same title concocted by Preston Sturges, in which maddened conductor Rex Harrison schemes *three* methods of striking down wife Linda Darnell; here the plots are reduced to one. The rich flow of black comedy, though, is far from rationed.

On the same light note, let me quickly recommend the new *To Be or Not To Be*, a close remake of the legendary espionage romp originally done by Ernst Lubitsch in 1942, in which a troupe of actors outwit the invading Nazis in stricken Poland.

Traitors, spies, corpses, great impersonations, *fun*.

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THE JURY BOX
by ALLEN J. HUBIN

Although the classic detective story challenges the reader to solve the case before the fictional sleuth, a small subgenre of our field even more explicitly presents a crime for the reader to solve. This subgenre comprises mystery quiz books—collections of fictional vignettes, sometimes illustrated, containing one or more key clues to the actual

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villain. Lassiter Wren and Randle McKay started things off in the late 1920s with a series of "Baffle" books, and in England J. C. Cannell offered "100 Mysteries for Arm-Chair Detectives" in 1932. Others followed through the years, including one in which the quizzes were in playlet form ("Murder in Your Home" by Elizabeth Cobb and Margaret Case Morgan, 1932), one by August Derleth ("Consider Your Verdict" as by Tally Mason, 1937), and quite recently several by Lawrence Treat (including "Crime and Puzzlement" I and II, Godine, $4.95 and $5.95, respectively).

The latest of these is *Photo Crimes* (Simon & Schuster, $7.95), an oversized volume of 20 puzzles, each illustrated with some 12 photographs. This is the most complex and difficult of mystery quizzes, with the clues very inobtrusively arrayed in the pictures. Various supplementary clues and hints are available, which if used reduce the solver's score. This will tax your ratiocination!

Holmesian pastiches continue. The most recent, *Ten Years Beyond Baker Street* (Harper & Row, $14.95), adds Fu Manchu to the mix, and the mixing is appropriately and enjoyably done by Cay Van Ash, Sax Rohmer biographer ("Master of Villainy," 1972) and Tokyo literature professor. Nayland Smith, who pursued Fu Manchu through all those Rohmerian years and tales, is abducted from his London flat early in 1914. The police are not helpful, and Dr. Petrie, Smith's "Watson," rushes to Sussex, where Holmes lives in beekeeping and Watson-less retirement. Sherlock is not much interested in being reactivated, but an ill-advised and gruesome murder propels him into the fray. The dim trail leads to Wales, where the battle between the mighty intellects of Holmes and Fu Manchu ranges across wild mountain, city, and seaside. Methinks this is one of the best of the numerous pastiche novels of recent years.

The world's most obtrusive spy, 6'7" Appleton Porter, returns for the sixth time in Marc Lovell's *How Green Was My Apple* (Doubleday, $11.95). A philologist by trade, incompetent at armed or unarmed combat, incapable of credible falsehood, afflicted with a tendency toward fluorescent blushes, Porter would hardly seem the man for a field assignment. But his master, Angus Watkin of British Intelligence, teams him with a fetching 6'1" female named Kate and assigns them to watch a very minor employee of the Russian embassy. Appleton is distracted by separation from Monico (his dog, boarding in the country) and Ethel (his kidnaped apple-green, orange-striped car), and by the attractions of Kate. Not surprisingly, the spying business comes unstuck. Amusing nonsense.

Ray Bradbury is justly famous for his fantasy tales. It's less known that he served his apprenticeship in the mystery pulps under the tutelage of Leigh Brackett. Now at last *A Memory of Murder* (Dell, $2.95) collects for the first time 15 Bradbury tales from 1944–48 detective magazines, with an Intro-

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duction by the author. No hard-boiled stuff here, nor the normal pulpish diet of slam-bang action-dialogue narrative. These are mood pieces, exploring mind and emotion, evoking lostness and emptiness and fear, with just an occasional flash of humor, or a dip into the supernatural. Not masterpieces, these stories, but very competent, foreshadowing what was to come—and is to come, for that matter, for Bradbury's first full-length crime novel has been announced for publication.

Against Michael Gilbert's extremely high standard, I reckon his latest, *The Black Seraphim* (Harper & Row, $13.95), comes out average. It has not the intensely involving narrative nor the razor-sharp characterization of Gilbert's best, but it certainly is an agreeable diversion. Pathologist James Scotland, suffering from overwork, goes to the church town of Milchester to rest and relax. But ecclesiastical and commercial intrigues, culminating in a corpse, plus a comely and strong-willed lass, give him little time for R&R. Dean against church-deacon, city against church, police against Cathedral Close, and pathologist against evidence—all a part of Gilbert's brew here.

Charlie Maxwell gave 38 expert years to the CIA. Then doctors gave him six months more—inoperable cancer. He decides where and how he wants to spend those months, but he hasn't the necessary money. Solution: sell a little to the Russians.

His colleagues take a dim view and want him back to find out which secrets he's spilled, while Charlie heads for his dying place in the shadow of the glorious Matterhorn. But ill luck follows, for at the next chalet Italians unsuccessfully try to hide a defecting maverick Russian genius. Vultures of all stripes gather, and Charlie is hidden no more, but a pawn again—a pawn with a gun. Solid, tense spy stuff, that's *A Good Death* by Philip Ross (Dodd Mead, $14.95).

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DETECTIVERSE

ANOTHER GRAVE TONE

by JAMES HOLDING

Here lies Helen "The Faker" Shearer,
Done to death by a broken mirror—
A mirror she found, after diligent search,
At a rummage sale in a local church.
Its glass was flawed, its silvering hazed,
Its cheap wood frame was cracked and crazed,
But Helen, "The Faker," within a week
Could make it look like a real antique—
An Eighteenth Century Girandole
For which a collector would give his soul.
So she bought the thing for a dollar-ten
And went to work on it in her den,
Until cruel Fate caused Mrs. Shearer
To drop and break the antiqued mirror—
And one of the shards, in a random twist,
Severed the artery in her wrist.
The sight of her blood in pulsing spout
So panicked her that she couldn't shout.
She started to tremble and then to blench,
Bleeding all over her workroom bench,
Her fear so great, her trauma utter,
That she could only stand and stutter
A call for help to her husband, Thor,
Who was near at hand in the room next door,
Deep in a faked-up Empire chair
And the final chapter of *Jane Eyre*—
With his hearing aid turned off (and squeaking)
To shut out the sounds of his wife's antiquing,
And thus quite deaf to the feeble crying
From the room next door where his wife was dying,
Thinking that death need come no nearer
If Mr. Shearer could hear her clearer.

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DETECTIVERSE

HOT POT

by LILLIAN de la TORRE

An English-horn player named Scott
Marijuana possessed—quite a lot.
So he stuffed it inside;
To requests he replied,
"I can't play, for my horn's gone to pot."

© 1984 by Lillian de la Torre.

"Q"

UNACCOUNTABLE

by MARK GRENIER

On a bank job a robber named Walt
Was confronted and ordered to halt.
Said the constable, "Shame!
You are clearly to blame."
Said the robber, "It wasn't my vault."

© 1984 by Mark Grenier.

"Q"

HOSPITAL-ESCAPE MYSTERY

by MARJORY FARRINGTON

The bad guy was lurking inside,
To take the fair nurse for a ride.
Clutching soap to her heart,
She hid deep in a cart
And then simply went out with the Tide.

© 1984 by Marjory Farrington.

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When Samantha Jane came, things weren't so good. Then their second daughter Corina came along and the whole same thing started again.

The author of EQMM "first story" #614 is Inge Moore, who was born in Austria in 1950 and graduated with a B.Sc. from the University of Guelph, Ontario, in 1972. Since then, she has worked in several branches of biological research in Canada and England, publishing numerous scientific articles in the fields of ecology and entomology. Currently, she resides in the province of Alberta, Canada. Her interests include horseback riding, boating, and writing. We are privileged to introduce this versatile and gifted woman's first fiction . . .

HAPPY FOR A WHILE

by INGE MOORE

You're askin' why a cute little thing like me's in a dump like this? You really want to know? That's kinda nice. Most people don't inquire.

It started way back when I was a little girl, see. I had dreams—beautiful dreams so close to my heart I didn't tell *nobody* about them. I wanted to be rich. I wanted to grow up and marry a doctor or a lawyer and live in a big white house with all the bedrooms upstairs and keep it cleaned and shined and cook real fancy meals and give parties and be the best wife in the world. I wanted my kids to have fluffy dresses and neat little suits and piano lessons and swimming lessons and we'd all get trips to Spain and China.

The way it turned out wasn't like that. My kids never got nothing. Just a mother who was too worn out to play and not enough money for a Brownie uniform, never mind lessons or trips. I really love my girls, though. Sometimes I'd scream and slap them, like when I was

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dead beat and they bothered me. Then I'd feel awful guilty because I do love them, truly.

I screwed my life up myself, you see. I married Corky. He was cute. At first, I never thought I'd marry him—I was just killing time until I met the doctor or the lawyer. My plan was to go to secretarial school in the big city—Edmonton, that is—and get a job in a doctor's office or a law firm.

But then Corky and me, we kind of fell in love. We started fooling around and eventually we got caught. I was real happy for a while. We had a nice little trailer Corky's dad gave us and Corky already worked in a garage, he didn't have to quit school or nothin'.

Anyway, it was nice. I just stayed at home, cleaned up, and cooked cheap stuff special-like. For fun, I took long walks and thought of what to put on when Corky came home. When he finally did, we'd snuggle and watch TV or sometimes he'd take me out for a drink at the Homesteader. I was real glad then that I didn't wait and marry for money, 'cause I sure loved Corky.

Then Samantha Jane came and things weren't so good. I had awful troubles then. My stitches ached so bad I felt like that part of me was a big raw wound that would never heal. Corky expected me to, well—to keep him happy *that* way—and it just made me sick. It was all mixed up in my mind with the baby, and my breasts were so tight and hard, leaking milk everyplace, I just *couldn't*. Then she cried so much, Samantha Jane, that Corky'd be screaming at me to shut her up and I'd be crying and yelling, too, and pretty soon he stopped coming home at night.

Well, I guess he missed us because after a while he came back and things straightened out a bit—until our second daughter Corina came along and the whole same thing started again. Corky said he didn't want another one and that I was a selfish witch. Then he told me about the other girls he knew who *liked* looking after him and didn't smell like sour milk. Finally he left and I was real scared—but I was glad, too.

I said to myself, I'm not so bad off. I'm only nineteen. I've gotta lose some weight maybe, get in shape, but I'll be all right.

I was lucky. I called the Mental Health and Social Services and they put me on welfare for till the kids were bigger and arranged for me to talk to someone once a month about my problems. He gave me pills for my depression—only they made my heart beat so fast I had to stop taking them. I got bored talking to him, too. Know

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what he asked me? "Where did you come from?" he said. "How did you get here?"

"I was born—what else?" I says.

Then he wants to know how did my mother and father meet. Well, how should I know? I never knew that. Anyway, I got tired of that stuff and I quit, but they still left me on welfare. And the trailer was still mine. We'd be living in it now if I wasn't here and the kids in foster homes.

That guy though, the shrink, was cute—old, but cute. He reminded me of my dad in some ways. My dad never talked to me after I got pregnant, by the way. Even the shrink agreed that wasn't nice. If the shrink wasn't married, I'd of kept seeing him on the chance he might get interested in me.

Well, anyway, he said I should get a job as soon as the kids were a bit older so I could get out and meet people. A couple of years later I did, in a restaurant, and boy did I regret it. I was so tired, I was half dead. And I couldn't quit and get welfare back.

But I guess the job had its good parts. I met lots of men and lots of men liked me. I have a nice figure, if you don't mind my saying so, heavy but nice. And I was real friendly and jokey and cute, they said. Still, I wasn't having much to do with any truck drivers or grease monkeys. Once was enough. I drank with them and had some laughs, but that's all. I didn't want them near my kids.

Every day, though, at three o'clock, the town's lawyers came into the Prince Edward where I worked. They had coffee and talked about their cases. They were so clean I could almost taste it, you know? They smelled like real expensive perfume, the kind I never had.

Well, one day a new one was sitting there at their table. He was gorgeous—young, handsome, debonair. I practically fell in love with him then and there. Then when he gets up, I see he's only got one leg and my heart flips. I mean I feel so *sorry* for him, I just want to take him home and make him better.

He stays in town, too. Comes back every day. I shiver when I pour his coffee, know what I mean? And I'm praying he'll notice me. I'm hoping maybe with his leg gone and all, he'll maybe not be too choosy. And to hear him talk! Vienna, Barcelona, Singapore—he's been everyplace! I'm a lot quieter when he's around. I don't joke. I want him to think I'm more refined than an ordinary waitress, just in bad circumstances—like him and his leg.

Well, one time it happens. He asks if he can take me out that night and I'm thrilled. I say yes and I spend fifty bucks we don't got

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on a dress from Adler's, a silvery black number that's cut way low down the back. It looks fantastic. So I'm disappointed when Tom just takes me to the Wild Rose Motel, but I don't complain—which is good, because it turns out to be a great night.

We had so many things in common, you know? He said so many nice things to me. I told him I loved him and he really liked that and I think I did all the things he liked and I thought he really liked me, too. It was a Friday night and I didn't get home till almost dawn.

All weekend, I was so happy. The kids were happy, too. I told them how life was going to be different now. They'd get to go places. "The zoo?" they asked. "The movies?" Sure, I told them. Sure. Why not? I said maybe they'd even get ponies and we'd buy a piano and they'd get smart and really *be* somebody one day. Because that's what I believed. That's what I thought he meant. He said he liked kids. He told me that. He said I was special . . .

I was a bit worried when he didn't call me like he said he would that Sunday, but I figured he got tied up or something. But I wasn't ready when he ignored me in the restaurant on Monday. I said, "Hi, Tom," and he didn't smile—he didn't even say, "Hi, Tammy-Lee" like he used to. I got the message. Then I remembered what he said when he dropped me home Saturday morning. He said, "Thanks for tonight." I said, "You're welcome." *Now* I got it. He'd meant, "Tonight is *it*—there is no more." He was just saying it nicely. I was a real jerk not to see what he meant. Corky might not have been the greatest, but he always said things out straight. Well, I went into the kitchen and cried and cried and didn't care if they fired me, which they didn't—I'm too good a worker.

Later, at quitting time, I drove off to pick up the girls. I got stopped at the light and there he was, Tom, crossing right in front of me. My heart jumped and I waved. He looked right at me and his face didn't change a bit, just stayed real cold-like. He *used* to smile at me. Without thinking about it, I gunned the motor and ran him down. He went under the car and I just kept right on going.

When I got home, I told my kids the bad news about how they weren't ever gonna get out of Four Hills and do the stuff they wanted to. I felt more sorry for them than I did for him. He really oughta have smiled . . .

I got ten years for manslaughter. There's good chances for parole and stuff like that, but Eugene—he's my lawyer—doesn't want me to discuss it. You've probably seen Eugene around. He wears three-piece suits and knit ties. Real cute. And he smiles all the time.

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starting a *NEW* series by

JOSH PACHTER

It has been over ten years since we last published a story by Josh Pachter, who wrote his first published story, "E. Q. Griffen Earns His Name" (EQMM, December 1968), when he was sixteen years old. Now, sixteen years later, he has created a new detective, Mahboob Ahmed Chaudri, eighteen months a natoor *on the Bahraini police force and ready any day now for his first promotion . . .*

THE DILMUN EXCHANGE

by JOSH PACHTER

The *muezzin*'s call to dawn prayer echoed sadly down Bab-al-Bahrain Avenue. It was 4:00 A.M. and the long narrow street—the main artery of Manama's old shopping district, the *suq*—was almost deserted. A beggar woman squatted, motionless, beside the doorway of Dilmun Exchange Services and Wholesale Jewelers, completely covered by her black silk *abba*, even her face and her extended palm swathed in black and invisible. Except for her, the road was empty. It would be hours yet before the merchants began to arrive, to raise the heavy metal shutters which protected their shop windows, to unlock their glass doors and switch on their electric cash registers, to look over their merchandise and drink one quiet cup of strong coffee before the madness began.

It was October 1, the first day of the autumn sales. For the next two weeks, by official decree of the Emir himself, every shop in the tiny island-nation of Bahrain would slash 20 percent or more from its prices on all items but food. At 8:00 A.M. the sales would begin, and thousands of Arabs and expatriates would pour into the *suq* from all over the country, showering tens of thousands of dinars on

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the merchants and artisans, driving home to dinner with the backs of their cars filled with a mind-boggling array of television sets, video recorders, stereo systems, cameras, typewriters, pocket calculators, digital watches, electronic games, refrigerators, air-conditioners, washing machines, microwave ovens, furniture, handwoven carpets, antique pearl chests, bracelets and necklaces of gold and silver, shirts and skirts and shoes and suits and dresses.

But the beginning of the madness was still hours away, and when Mahboob Chaudri turned off Government Road and walked under the tall white arches of the *bab*, the narrow street which stretched out before him was lonely and still, except for the solitary beggar and the dying echoes of the *muezzin*'s call.

Chaudri crossed the small plaza just inside the *bab* and paused to look up at the blue-and-white sign above the doorway of the squat off-white building on the corner. STATE OF BAHRAIN, the sign announced in English and Arabic, MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR, PUBLIC SECURITY, MANAMA POLICE STATION.

Why only English and Arabic? he wondered, as he wondered every morning. Why not Baluchi and Punjabi and Urdu, since almost two-thirds of us on the police force are Pakistani? Then, as always, he shrugged his shoulders, pushed the thought aside, and walked up the three stone steps into the station house.

A small group of *mahsools*, all of them Bahraini, lounged in the hallway, smoking imported cigarettes and talking idly. Chaudri greeted them with deference—he was always careful to be courteous to his superior officers—and walked on back to the locker room.

He was early this morning and no one else was there yet. He unbuttoned his sports shirt and hung it away in his locker, took off his bluejeans and folded them onto a second hanger, and placed his tennis shoes neatly beneath them. Many of the other men came to work in *jutti* and the traditional Pakistani *punjab*—knee-length cotton shirt and baggy trousers, both in the same pale shade of orange or brown or blue—but Chaudri liked the look of Western clothes and wore them whenever he was off duty.

He pulled on his drab-green uniform shirt and pants, adjusted his shoulder braid, knotted his olive-green tie, tucking the bottom half of it away between the second and third buttons of his shirt, and stepped into his sturdy black shoes. Then he faced the mirror inside the door of his locker and positioned his dark-green beret on his head, turning this way and that to make sure it was sitting well.

Satisfied at last, he stepped back from the mirror so he could see

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more of himself. He liked what he saw: Mahboob Ahmed Chaudri, twenty-eight years of age and not bad-looking, with his deep-brown skin, his regular features, and his immaculate, imposing uniform. Mahboob Ahmed Chaudri, eighteen months a *natoor* on the Bahraini police force and ready any day now for his first promotion. He would be sorry to give up that lovely green beret, but glad to trade it in for the peaked cap of a *mahsool*.

The room was beginning to fill up now and Chaudri closed the door of his locker and joined one of the half dozen conversations going on around him. It was 4:20 A.M.—and he still had ten minutes of his own time left before roll call.

By the time his half hour break began, at 9:00 A.M., the sales were well under way. Bab-al-Bahrain Avenue and the labyrinth of side streets and alleyways branching off from it were inundated with honking cars and bustling shoppers. The air was hot and still, and heavy with the smells of cooking oil and automobile exhaust and sweat, the sounds of humanity and machinery joined together in grating cacophony.

But Mahboob Chaudri walked along with a smile on his face, patiently allowing the throngs to surge around him and jostle against him—small knots of Arab women in long black *abbas*, their faces hidden behind thin veils or the birdlike leather masks called *berga'a*; businessmen in ankle-length *thobes* with red-and-white checkered *ghutras* arranged carefully on their heads; bankers of forty countries in expensive three-piece suits; expat wives in modest skirts and blouses; Dutch construction workers and Korean longshoremen and British oil riggers in grease-stained jeans; Indian nannies in flowing *saris*, their midriffs bare or swathed in filmy gauze; children of every color and nationality and description. Chaudri's monthly pay envelope was in his pocket, he had half an hour free, and he was on his way to the Dilmun Exchange to buy rupees to send home to his wife and children in Karachi.

Outside the money-changing office, the lone beggar woman still sat. Or was this a different one? Shrouded in black, not an inch of skin visible, unmoving, there was no way to tell. Chaudri pulled a 100-fils piece from his pocket and laid it gently on her covered, outstretched palm. "*El lo, majee*," he mumbled in his native Punjabi. "Take this, mother."

The woman did not answer him, not even with a nod.

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Under that abba, she could be fast asleep, thought Chaudri. She could even be dead.

He went into the exchange office. It was a plain room. Behind a wooden counter running along the far wall, a grey-bearded Bahraini in *thobe* and *ghutra* sat working a pocket calculator. Above his head hung a large black board with the day's exchange rates—buying and selling prices for American, Canadian, and Australian dollars, French and Swiss francs, Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian kronor, British pounds, German marks, Dutch guilders, Italian lira, Saudi Arabian riyals, Japanese yen, and a dozen other currencies. There were a few faded travel posters taped to the walls, an ashtray standing in front of the counter for the use of the clientele, an oversized air-conditioner humming morosely, and that was all.

Five men and a woman were waiting to be helped, as the Bahraini made his computations and counted out thick stacks of 10- and 20-dinar notes.

Chaudri took his place at the end of the line and looked up at the rate board. Almost thirty rupees to the dinar, he read happily. A good rate. Shazia and the children would have a comfortable month.

The first man in line scooped up his wad of bills from the counter, muttered a low-pitched "*Shukran*," and left the office. Chaudri and the other clients shuffled a place forward.

And then the door behind them banged open, and Chaudri whirled around at the noise.

A tall man with dark-brown hair and burning eyes stood just inside the doorway. It was impossible to tell whether he was a native or an expat. A woman's leather *berga'a* hid most of his face and he did not speak. There was a gun in his hand, a dull-black revolver, and he held it firmly, not trembling.

He stood for a moment, allowing the realization of danger to reach through layers of shock into the minds of his victims, then he reached behind him and flipped the sign hanging inside the glass door to read CLOSED, turned the key in the deadbolt, and pulled down the shade. Only then did he wave his gun at them, motioning them to the side wall of the office.

"Turn around," he told them, "faces to the wall. Hands high above your heads, feet spread wide." His voice was cold and hard; he spoke accented but precise Arabic.

A Yemeni? thought Chaudri automatically, his eyes fixed on a flyspeck on the wall two inches before him. A Kuwaiti?

Over the irritated hum of the air-conditioner, he could hear the

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thief unfold a plastic grocery bag and begin to stuff it with stacks of crisp banknotes. He'll take the dinars, the American dollars and the riyals, Chaudri guessed, and leave the rest of it be—

"Now listen carefully," the voice interrupted his thoughts, "especially you, *natoor*. Do exactly what I tell you and by Allah's grace no one will get hurt."

"By Allah's grace!" the grey-haired clerk burst out furiously. "How *dare* you talk about—"

There was a blur of sound as the thief dashed across the room and clubbed the old Bahraini fiercely with the butt end of his revolver. Chaudri stole a look to the side in time to see the clerk crumple limply to the ground and the masked figure back away.

"Do what he says," Chaudri instructed the rest of them. "Don't speak, don't move, and don't worry. It will be all right."

"Thank you for your assistance, *natoor*," the bandit said crisply. Chaudri could hear no sarcasm in it, which surprised him. This man is truly calm, he thought. He knows just what he is doing.

"If you follow the advice which the *natoor* has so intelligently given you," the voice resumed, "no one else will have to be hurt. And as you have seen, if you do *not* heed that advice, I will show you no mercy. No mercy at all."

Chaudri listened intently. If I can't memorize his face, he thought, at least I can memorize that heartless voice.

"In a few moments I will be leaving you," the thief went on. "Before I go, I will say to you the word 'Begin.' When I say that word, you will begin to count aloud, in unison, from one to one hundred. You will keep your faces to the wall and your hands high and go on counting no matter what happens. When you reach one hundred, you may put your hands down and turn around and go about your business. If any of you should decide to take a chance and come after me before you have finished counting—well, that is a chance I would recommend you avoid. I have a confederate in the street, who is armed and will shoot to kill. Your families will be saddened to hear of your senseless death."

That was a lie, Chaudri was certain. There was no confederate in the street. This man works alone and will share his loot with no one, I can feel it. But can I afford to gamble my life on that feeling?

No, he decided. No.

"Thank you all for your cooperation," the voice concluded. "And now, you may begin."

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"*Oahed*," Chaudri said tightly, and the others spoke with him. "*Th'neen, t'lasse, arba'a, hamseh . . .*"

As they counted, he heard the door bolt being thrown and the door swing smoothly open and then, after soft footsteps passed through it, shut. The temptation to give chase, or at least to raise the alarm, was very strong, but the thief's words rang loudly in Chaudri's ears: Your family will be saddened to hear of your senseless death.

"*Thamnta'ash*," he counted grimly, "*tsata'ash, ashreen, oahed-ashreen . . .*"

Suddenly there was the sound of a shot, and glass shattering, and an overwhelming clamor from the startled mobs of shoppers outside.

Chaudri stiffened. Allah give me strength, he prayed silently as he continued to count the Arabic numbers out in the charged atmosphere of the exchange office. Forty, he reached as the bedlam outside swelled riotously, and sixty as it crested, then seventy as it began a slow descent back toward the everyday pandemonium of the October sales, and eighty-five as the strident cries of a dozen police officers became audible above the din, shouting questions and issuing commands to the crowd . . .

"*Sa'ba'ah watis'een*," Chaudri counted diligently, his palms itching with a feverish ache to be out in the street, "*thamania watis'een, tis'ah watis'een, ma'ah!*"

Before the dull echo of the final number had faded, Chaudri was on the sidewalk outside the Dilmun Exchange, his eyes drinking in the scene before him greedily: a tight half circle of police and passersby across the street gathered in front of the smashed display window of the Akhundawazi Trading Company. Up and down Bab-al-Bahrain Avenue as far as he could see in either direction the shoppers ebbed and flowed, laden with bags and boxes and gaily wrapped packages, an endless tide of bargain-hunting humanity.

"Did you see him?" Chaudri demanded of the black-draped beggar, who had not moved from her perch beside the door. Unlike the first time he had addressed her, he spoke now in flawless Arabic. "The last man to leave this office, mother—did you see which way he went?"

The woman nodded her head stiffly and moved a hand underneath her *abba* to point south.

Chaudri was off at once. "Thank you, mother," he threw back over his shoulder as he ran, his feet pounding against the concrete paving stones, his clenched teeth jarring with every stride.

But it was hopeless, he realized, before he had gone a hundred

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yards. Completely hopeless. By now the thief could have bolted down any one of a dozen side streets, could have strolled casually into any of a thousand shops, could be trying on a pair of trousers or pricing gold bangles or sipping sweet tea from a gently steaming glass. What chance did he, Mahboob Chaudri, have of being lucky enough to stumble across a single man with a bag of money, a woman's face mask, and a gun, intent on losing himself in the tangled, teeming maze of the old *suq?*

Hopeless, he thought as he ran, disgusted with his caution back at the exchange office, with the cumbersome uniform and clumsy shoes which slowed him down, with the infuriating crowds.

What could he do? What, if it came to that, could the entire 6,000-man Public Security Force do? One hundred friends are not enough, as the old Bedouin saying had it, but a single enemy is too many. Yes, they could close off the airport and watch the fishing *dhows* and almost certainly prevent the criminal from leaving the country. But if the man chose to *stay*, if he went to ground, say, out in A'ali or Bani Jamra or one of the other villages, if he actually *had* a confederate, after all, who was willing to hide him, then there was no way they would ever find him. He could disappear into the desert sands of Bahrain and the country would swallow him up so completely that it would be as if he had never existed.

Chaudri stopped running, leaned weakly against a stretch of wooden scaffolding, and lowered his head, gasping hoarsely and filling his exhausted lungs with air.

Was it but a single enemy he was faced with? What if he'd been wrong, if there *had* been a confederate out in the street? The thief could have passed him that incriminating plastic bag, gotten rid of the money and mask and gun, and melted invisibly away into the crowd.

But that made no sense. Giving the bag to a confederate would leave the thief in the clear, yes, but then what about the *confederate?* If *he* were found with the bag in his possession, then—

And what was the point of the gunshot? Was it intended simply to draw the crowd's attention away from the thief's escape? If so, why had he bothered? The shoppers hadn't known that the Dilmun Exchange was being robbed.

Chaudri pulled himself upright and began to retrace his steps. He arranged and rearranged the pieces in his head, manipulating them like the misshapen interlocking loops of the silver puzzle ring he

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had bought for his daughter Peveen's last birthday, trying to fit them together into an organized, sensible whole.

The Dilmun Exchange. A tall, controlled thief, his identity hidden behind a leather mask. The violent attack on the harmless old Bahraini clerk. "Count to one hundred" . . . "Your families will be saddened" . . . a gunshot . . . the crowds . . . the clamor . . . the Dilmun Exchange . . .

And then suddenly the pieces dropped softly into place.

"*Merea rabba!*" Chaudri exclaimed aloud, reverting unconsciously to Punjabi. "Oh, dearie me, of course!"

He was sure of it, he was positive, but before he could prove it there was one question he would have to ask—if only he was not too late! He broke into a jog, weaving carefully from side to side to avoid the scores of shoppers milling in his path.

As he neared the Dilmun Exchange, he saw that the old beggar woman was still there, rocking rhythmically back and forth, her upturned palm, still covered by the black fabric of her *abba*, a silent plea for charity.

He walked up to her, stood over her, looked down at her—and asked her his question. "Tell me, mother, what is your name?"

The black shape that was her head turned up to him, but the woman did not speak.

"Your name, mother," Chaudri repeated. "Tell me your name."

She put a hand to her lips and shook her head.

"Oh, no, mother," said Chaudri, "you are not mute. It is only that you do not wish to speak. And why is that, I find myself wondering?"

Her other hand began to rise, but the *natoor* gripped the wrist firmly and pointed it towards the sky.

"No, mother," he said. "Your friend has already fired one shot this morning, and one shot was more than enough for today."

"I was certain the thief had lied when he told us about his confederate in the street," Chaudri admitted to the eager ring of *shurtis* who surrounded him, "but I was wrong. There *was* a confederate, strategically situated right outside the door of the Dilmun Exchange while the robbery took place."

"The beggar woman," supplied Sikander Malek.

"Of course." Chaudri leaned back in his chair and sipped slowly at his tea. He was enjoying himself immensely. "She was out in front of the Exchange very early this morning," he told his listeners. "I saw her there when I reported to work at dawn. And when I went

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to the exchange office at nine to buy a bank draft to send home to my wife, she was still there. I even gave her a hundred fils, laid the coin on her palm, and blessed her, and scolded myself for not giving more. She never said a word of thanks, but I thought nothing of it at the time. It was not until later, after the robbery, that I realized the importance of her silence—realized that her silence had been necessary in order to preserve the illusion."

"The illusion?" one of the *shurtis* prompted.

"The illusion that the figure underneath that all-concealing black *abba* was an innocent beggar, an innocent beggar *woman*, no less—when in fact it was a man, our thief's accomplice and brother."

"But how could you have known they were brothers?"

"I didn't know. But when I pulled the *abba* away from him, revealing the bag of money and the mask and the gun, proving his complicity in the crime, he confessed the entire scheme to me and led me straight to the small apartment in Umm al Hassam where they lived together—where his brother, unarmed, was awaiting him."

"And their scheme?"

"A simple plan, devised by simple men, but a clever one nonetheless. As soon as he stepped out of the exchange office, the thief fired a shot across the street, above the heads of the crowd, shattering the window of the Akhundawazi Trading Company. Then he stuffed his gun and mask into the plastic bag which already held his loot, set the bag down next to the black-draped form of his brother, and melted away into the crowd. With a quick readjustment of his *abba*, the beggar woman-brother covered over the bag, and that was that. Transferring the incriminating evidence from brother to brother took no more than a few swift seconds and easily went unnoticed in the excitement and confusion that followed the gunshot. Then, when I finally reached the street and asked the beggar which way the thief had gone, she had only to point in the wrong direction—and I, suspecting nothing, chased futilely after a thief who had gone the other way."

"But why did the brother sit there and wait for your return? Why didn't he make good his own escape as soon as you'd gone? No one would have seen the bag beneath the folds of his *abba*."

"A good question, my friend," said Chaudri. "But before I answer it, let me raise another, equally interesting. Why did the thief's brother take up his position in front of the Dilmun Exchange before four o'clock this morning, when his presence there would not be

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required until after nine? The answer to your question and to mine will seem obvious once you recognize it: the thief's brother arrived at the scene much earlier than he needed to be there, and stayed on well after his role in the commission of the crime was finished, *because he could not risk being seen walking either to or from the Dilmun Exchange.*

"And why not? Because if he *had* been seen, it would have shattered the illusion he had created so carefully—shattered it as finally as his brother's bullet shattered the plate-glass window of the Akhundawazi store. They were brothers, you see, similar in appearance and—this is the critical point—almost equal in height. And have you ever seen a beggar woman as tall as our unhappy prisoners? No, he *had* to get there early, before anyone else was about, and he had to sit there until the streets were again deserted before he could try to escape. Otherwise his height would surely have been noticed."

"One more question," said Sikander Malek. "How did you figure it all out?"

"Ah, now *that* is a question I would much prefer to leave unanswered. Because, you see, I'm not really sure that I *did* figure it out at all. I was thinking over the features of the robbery when the explanation suddenly came to me from nowhere—or perhaps I should say 'by Allah's grace.' The Dilmun *Exchange:* that was not only the scene of the crime, it was the solution to the crime as well. For there *had* been several exchanges, when the bag of money changed hands and—more important—when the thief's brother exchanged his own identity for that of an old beggar woman. I had been running away from the Dilmun Exchange, but the answer was there, back where I had started, all the time.

"When I was a boy in Punjab, my grandfather once said to me, 'If you are on the road to knowledge, my child, then you are journeying in the wrong direction. For knowledge is not a place you can get to by traveling; it is a place you come from, by standing still and listening to your heart.' "

Mahboob Ahmed Chaudri, *natoor*, smiled broadly and drank the last of his tea.

"Stand still," he repeated contentedly, thinking of the promotion which this day's work was certain to bring him, of the raise in salary that would go along with a higher rank, and of the bungalow back home in Jhang-Maghiana that he was saving to build for Shazia and the children. "Stand still and trust in your heart."

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"This is your cousin Edward, who paints famous pictures," Lady Ogilvy declared.

The child gazed upon him earnestly, and then, in the prettiest way possible, piped up, "Will you paint a famous one of me?"

An evocative story, with a slight, elusive touch of Jane Eyre . . .

FAERY TALE

by CELIA DALE

I, Edward Augustus Steynes, Associate of the Royal Academy of Arts, of Holland Park, London, wish to set down—yes, in hot blood, while the events of the monstrous persecution of my ward are still fresh in my mind (not that they will ever fade but will remain branded on my memory)—the truth as I know it of the misfortunes which culminated in scenes worthy of a Roman circus rather than an English Coroner's Court, and the effects of which are only now, some five weeks later, beginning to recede into the nightmare past but from which, I fear, the delicate sensibilities of a young girl may never entirely recover.

To understand fully the sequence of events which led to this monstrous persecution, it is necessary to go back many years—to 1868, it must have been, when my cousin Rollo Ogilvy brought his motherless daughter Blanche back to England from India, where he had held a commission in a cavalry regiment. Although the atrocious Mutiny was in the past, the anxieties and rigours of Army life, allied to a constitution always frail and further weakened by a second pregnancy, had been too much for Rollo's young wife Clara, to whom he was extravagantly attached, and she and the unborn babe had been laid to rest among, alas, so many of her compatriots in that alien land. Overwhelmed by grief, Rollo resigned his commission and returned to find refuge in the Oxfordshire home of his mother, Lady Ogilvy, widow for many years of my uncle, who had been a prosperous merchant knighted for his services to Industry and the Poor.

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I was at that time establishing myself as a painter of classical subject pictures—my "Sweet Echo . . . Within Thy Airy Shell" attracted much critical commendation at the Royal Academy Exhibition that year—and I did not visit Long Basing until the Christmas after their arrival there. My aunt was a formidable woman who kept great state, and although one's creature comforts were excellently catered for, I had always found her rules and regulations irksome (one was not allowed to smoke even in the billiard-room but must brave the elements on the terrace or, at best, the stables if in need of a cheroot).

But Christmas was a Day of Obligation (as the Romans have it) and I always spent the two days of its festivities there, as much to honour my uncle's memory as my aunt's command.

My aunt had thought very little of Rollo's marriage. He was her only child and she had great ambitions for him, I presume. She had considered Clara to be weakly (and was correct), that to take her out to India would kill her (correct again), and that she was not of the stuff to breed good sturdy sons (once more, correct). But Rollo—a handsome fellow of great charm, whom many a duke's daughter might have looked on with favour—was head over heels in love, and duly bore his Clara off to those far reaches of our Sovereign's Might. Clara was only twenty-four when she passed away, and although I had met her only at her wedding, I had always remembered her fragile gold-and-silver beauty, delicate as thistledown.

My first sight of Blanche that Christmas Eve made me catch my breath, for she was her mother in miniature. She was six years old at the time, brought to the drawing-room by her nurse to watch the candles being lit upon the Christmas tree. She could have graced the tree herself, for she was a faery child of pink-and-white, her long fair tresses falling down her little back to cover the wide sash at her waist, her full frilled petticoats rustling atop little feet shod in bronze slippers and drawn-thread socks.

Her nurse, a large slab-faced woman of fierce mien, held her fast, but she pulled her hand away and sped towards her father, love and gladness shining in her face.

My aunt admonished her and bade her curtsey first to herself and then to me.

"This is your cousin Edward," she declared, "who paints famous pictures."

The child gazed upon me earnestly, and then, in the prettiest way possible, piped up, "Will you paint a famous one of me?"

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"Indeed I will, my dear," I answered. And so indeed I did in the years to come.

The purity of childhood is unique. Beside it, men and women are as dross—heavy, brutish, tainted with the knowledge of sin. But a child is all innocence, all Creation, the wonder of the world in her eyes, her little body fresh and resilient as a flower. Gaze into a child's face and see with a painter's eye the marble eyeball, lustrous and fringed with curving lashes, the tender flush of cheek, the rosebud freshness of lip and the pearly teeth within. Every portion of a child is a miracle of God's work, pure and untouched by the dark forces that bedevil man and woman.

And so their minds are, too, each day a wonder of discovery, each hour one in which they can bestow their artless love on His creations. Fears they may have, of witches and ogres perhaps; but fears of the desires and appetites that lurk within the adult human soul they have no knowledge of. They are as God made them—unstained, fresh from His hand.

This I have always tried to capture in my works. Not for me the haggard and unwholesome visions of the Rossettis and their ilk! Rather I try to capture on canvas the pearly radiance of young flesh and spirit—caught well, I think, in my "Not Angles but Angels" (now in Stopford Art Gallery) or "Attendant on Queen Mab" (Wenham Town Hall).

I have had my struggles, my dark nights of the soul—all men have wrestled with the Devil, art students not least of all. Depravity and destruction are all too easy to embrace. But the Soul must rise above it and shall be as a little child.

I returned to London and my studio after Christmas, but my thoughts often turned to that faery child and her piping query. And I wondered how she would fare, torn from the sultry land of her birth, motherless at so tender an age, under the cold authority of Lady Ogilvy and that intimidating nurse.

The answer was—badly. For her father, unable to reconcile himself to the loss of his young wife or to apply himself either to country life or to the building of some new career, had disappeared into America. "He intends to take up what is called 'ranching,' " my aunt wrote in her spiked calligraphy, "although since he is ignorant of even the basic principles of home farming I am dubious of his success." More than this, Blanche herself fell grievously ill, and my aunt intimated (it was not in her nature to beg) that I should visit

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them at Long Basing, as the child sorely missed the attentions of a father.

I found her stretched upon a sofa, not in the nursery but in Lady Ogilvy's sitting-room, the long windows open onto the rose garden. She was playing listlessly with her dolls, and as she saw me advancing across the room her face lit up and she opened her little arms to me. "Papa!" she cried—then, as the truth struck her, she fell back, her mouth trembling.

"It is Cousin Edward come all the way from London," my aunt said.

The child brightened. "To paint my famous picture?" she enquired.

"Very likely," I said, sitting down on the couch beside her, "if that is what you wish."

"Oh, yes!" she cried and threw her arms about my neck. Her pale curls fell against my face and her little form trembled in my arms. She looked up, laughing. "Oh, Cousin Edward, you have such silky whiskers!" she declared. And ever after, when we were alone, she would call me Silky. And I would call her Faery.

The facts of her illness emerged. She had been ill because, ignorant of the flora of our English countryside, she had wandered in the garden alone and espied what she took to be green pea-pods lying on the path. Childlike, she had eaten some—but alas, they were not green peas but laburnum seeds and she was taken almost mortally ill.

Secondly, she was in my aunt's sitting-room and not the nursery because Nurse Hodge had been dismissed. Her negligence in allowing Blanche to wander unsupervised and so meet with an almost fatal accident had led Lady Ogilvy to dismiss her without a character, and she had packed her bags and taken herself off not to London but to the village inn, with whose widowed host she had, it appeared, been on somewhat familiar terms. My aunt had decided to care for the child herself, teaching her her letters and simple arithmetic, a nurserymaid being sufficient to see to her physical needs.

"With my son gone, Blanche is the only Ogilvy," my aunt said with her cold smile. "It is my duty—and my pleasure—to bring her up with due regard to her inheritance."

I stayed the month of August. During that time my faery regained her strength and spirits and ran about the house and gardens of Long Basing like some merry sprite. She was somewhat in awe of

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Lady Ogilvy and worked studiously at their lessons together, learning with the quickness of a singular intelligence. But between this faery child and myself there grew up an intimacy, a confidence which took me into the magic world of childhood. Hand in hand, we explored the woods and fields of the estate, looked at the animals on the Home Farm, and rode together, I on Rollo's neglected hunter, she on her fat pony. On rainy days we would play dominoes or Happy Families, or while she read the Tales from Shakespeare or Maria Edgeworth's stories I would take my pad and charcoal and sketch her as she sat, her cheek upon her hand, lost to the world.

She told me all her secrets, and once, when we sat one twilight in the nursery, she curled like a kitten on my lap, her little arms round my neck, she whispered, "I'm so glad that Nurse has gone."

"Was she unkind to you, dearest?"

"She was horrid. She pulled my hair and hurt my arms putting on my clothes. It was worth nearly dying to make her go away."

"But," I said, mystified, "you didn't know those horrid seeds were poisonous?"

"No, I did not. I shall remember another time. They hurt me awfully, but it was worth it to make Nurse go away and you to come."

I returned to London. Time passed. It was some two years later that my aunt summoned me unexpectedly to Long Basing. Rollo was dead. A band of "rustlers," as they are termed, had tried to drive away some of his cattle and in the fray Rollo had perished. My aunt, her face white marble in the cascading black of her mourning weeds, said stonily, "Blanche is my heir. She will grow up different from her father. When I die, you shall be her guardian."

Thereafter I was more often at Long Basing, and my faery was permitted to visit me in London several times a year, either with my aunt or, later on, with her maid Agnes.

These were joyous days indeed! Together, we visited the Zoological Gardens, Madame Tussaud's, Maskelyne, and Devants. At Christmas, there was the pantomime, my faery entranced by the more tawdry fairies on the stage and by the drolleries of Dan Leno. I watched her grow from a chubby child into a slender ten-year-old, as white and gold as her mother had been but with a vitality that shone in the pulsing of the blood in her delicate veins and in the candid challenge of her eyes. She took an enchanting pleasure in

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pretty clothes, and it was my delight to buy her frills and flounces, little muffs, a bonnet, or a small pelisse more frivolous than those allowed by my aunt, who kept her fairly strictly. She would throw her arms around my neck and shower kisses on me.

"Dearest Silky," she would whisper, "you are my best Papa." And each time we parted, in the sunlit, stable-smelling caverns of Paddington Station, she would say passionately, "I wish that we could be together always!"

It was the following spring that Lady Ogilvy had a stroke. It had been planned that she and Blanche, accompanied by their maids, should join me for two months in Dieppe, a small watering-place on the French coast much patronised by English artists (although mostly of a more radical school than myself). This plan had, of course, to be abandoned, and instead I repaired to Long Basing and spent the summer there.

It was a strange time. On the one hand, there was the sick room where my aunt, bed-bound and able to do nothing for herself, lay day after day, cared for by the servants and the regular visits of the doctor, a room of shadows and drawn curtains, low voices and the cloying odours of medicines, to which my faery made twice-daily visits, to read or prattle to my aunt as best she could while the maid took a brief respite—a sunbeam glancing into that drear room, in duty bound.

On the other, there were the fields and gardens, where Blanche and I wandered, she with her dolls, I with my sketching things, and the handsome, empty rooms of the house of which she and I were now the sole monarchs. In the morning-room, which faced north, I rigged up a studio, the carpet rolled up and put away, the curtains taken down. And there on many happy days I made my pictures—sketches, drawings, studies—my model my enchanting faery, content to sit as still as any eleven-year-old can be, artlessly prattling or sometimes falling silent, her eyes remote, lost in who knows what thoughts. Some of my finest compositions grew from these sessions, worked up in my London studio at a later date—"Cupid and My Campaspe"—Blanche half draped, a wreath of roses in her hair, leaning across a chequered board—and "Who Shall Be May Queen?" (now in Storrington Town Hall). These were idyllic days, in which beauty and innocence went hand in hand despite the dark shadow of the sick-room.

When the time came near, "I shall not be able to bear it when you

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go back to London," she whispered, her eyes luminous with tears. "Why cannot I come and live with you?"

I smoothed her hair. "Because you are all your grandmama has. Because you owe her duty in her last days."

"I cannot bear it," she repeated, and turned away from me with that mutinous pout I loved so well.

She did not, poor child, have to bear it long, for a day or two before I was due to depart, Lady Ogilvy was taken mortally ill during the night. Unable to help herself, her attendants sleeping, she succumbed to the ghastly symptoms of an acute disorder and died before morning.

I will draw a veil over the next few weeks or months—the grief, the condolences, the domestic and legal dispositions. Suffice it to say that, my aunt having indeed appointed me guardian of her grandchild and sole heir, I decided to maintain Long Basing, the only home Blanche had ever truly known, with the support of the excellent housekeeper and staff. I myself would divide my time between that household and my own in London, where the bulk of my clientele was to be found. The sketches and studies I made at Long Basing could be admirably worked up later in Holland Park. But the problem of my faery's education, hitherto undertaken by my aunt, remained. A series of governesses was the result.

I say a series, for, alas, perfection was hard to find. Some were too strict, some not strict enough, some were true bluestockings, most were mere geese. My faery had the bright intelligence of unspoiled childhood, was quick to grasp a subject, had read widely in the books ranged on the library walls, was impatient of restraint. "I don't need to learn French verbs like a parrot," she would cry, curled on my lap in her old sweet way (although now, in her thirteenth year, she was no longer a kitten but, perhaps, a small, smooth, lissome cat). "I will speak it well enough when we are in France together"—for I planned that holiday still. Or "Why do I need to know the water-table of Australia? I am never going to go there!"

Sometimes she came to me in tears. "Miss X is cruel to me, she raps my knuckles"—or, with pretty disdain, "Miss Y is so silly, she can only add up on her fingers."

The governesses too were loud in their complaints; few of them made allowance for the tragedies in my faery's short life. Nor, when I was absent, could they readily accept the authority of the house-

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keeper and the sometime insolence of the servants—a governess being neither fish nor fowl in the eyes of the lower orders.

Our most sunlit days were when she stayed with me in London, the faithful Agnes in attendance. Then, in her little ermine cape and muff, she would gaze wide-eyed at the wondrous displays in Regent Street or, in velvet and satin-sashed, clap her little hands at the antics of the clowns and harlequins. There were sunlit days, too, in Dieppe, the elegant, strolling crowds along the parade, the cakes and chocolat, the fellowship of brother artists gallantly curbing their sometimes raffish humour in deference to my young companion. Sunlit days indeed—in which the innocence of the child burgeoned into the radiance of the young girl, a child still but with the awareness of womanhood within her, half child, half woman, wholly mine.

More child than woman at first glance seemed Madeleine Fenton, daughter of an East Anglian rector and now cast upon the world at his death. But Miss Fenton's small and dainty person concealed a well stocked mind and a character both pliable and firm. Barely a head taller than my faery (who had grown apace, as children will), she seemed more like an elder sister than a governess, and so it seemed that Blanche regarded her. A whimsical humour, a gentle but discerning tact, fitted Madeleine Fenton into our household as though she had been meant for it.

At last, it seemed, our troubles were done. Miss Fenton was only nineteen years of age, still close enough to childhood to feel and understand the innocent joys of simple country life, while her dainty stature, the fresh and laughing candour of her face, made her seem almost Blanche's twin. To watch them run together down the wide lawns of Basing, to see their two heads bent together in the lamplight as though they were two students, not mentor and pupil, was a joy inexpressible to me. It seemed that Blanche had given her her heart.

And so had I.

It is difficult for me to write of subsequent events, for the agony is with me still. But I must do so, for my sole purpose in penning these lines is to vindicate and protect my faery, no matter what my own pain.

I began to care for Miss Fenton in a way which no woman my own age could ever evoke in me. Mature women, women wise in the ways of the world and of polite society, their beauty no longer with the

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bloom of innocence upon it, had never made appeal to me. I have seen too much of the world's dark side, of the shame and torment of our adult appetites, ever to feel true tenderness for those of my own age. But in Madeleine Fenton the bloom still glowed. Fresh from the Suffolk rectory, she knew nothing of the evils of humankind, but saw the world with the fresh vision of childhood. Her father had trained her mind but he had left her heart unsullied. I began to look at her with different eyes; to wonder if it might not be that we three could enter a faery world together, that these two bright spirits might not in fact become my child and my wife . . .

I cannot dwell on it. The bare facts can be read in the scurrilous gutter-press of the day.

Madeleine Fenton was taken ill during the night of July 27. Vomiting, pain unspeakable, fever, sweats. The doctor came. His potions eased her symptoms—but they returned. For three days she swung between life and death, and on the fourth day she died.

The doctor was mystified. He could not, he said, give out a Death Certificate. An inquest must be held.

It was held in the Parish Hall in Basing village. The Coroner was a jumped-up local solicitor with whom the Ogilvys had never been on good terms. My aunt had never received him as she had, for instance, the Rector or the doctor, and I believe he also nursed some resentment that he had never been put in charge of her affairs. These, which had been considerable, she had always deemed best to have handled by a London firm, a practise which I, as executor and Blanche's guardian, had continued. It was clear from the Coroner's opening remarks that he felt neither sympathy nor impartiality for the tragedy before him.

The acidulous—nay, malicious—tone of the proceedings soon captured the interest of the journalists sent by the newspapers. The Coroner's cross-questioning of Dr. Pierce was not concluded by the end of the day, and when the inquest was resumed on the morrow, the Grub Street jackals were there in abundance. TRAGIC EVENTS AT COUNTRY MANSION ran a headline in a London journal. MYSTERIOUS FATALITY AT FAMILY SEAT—DOCTOR QUIZZED ON HOUSE OF DOOM. For it had not taken the so-called Gentlemen of the Press long to discover and set out in paragraphs of lurid scurrility the sad facts in the family's past—the motherless child, the dramatic departure and subsequent death of the father, the sudden demise of Lady Ogilvy, and now that of Madeleine Fenton.

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In this sad catalogue the frail figure of the orphaned child stood out, a bright star in the midst of darkness, and on her the jackals fastened.

Only the doctor, myself, and Mrs. Poole, the housekeeper, had been required to attend the first day's proceedings. It was inconceivable to me that a child of tender years should be called on to do so, but when the doctor's evidence was at last concluded, the Coroner ordered that Blanche should be called on the following day. I sent a telegram to Mr. Forbes, our London lawyer, to be present, for at all costs I was determined to protect her by whatever means I could from the pain and confusion of what was fast becoming a raree show.

The Coroner also ordered that the domestic staff be called, and spent much time in questioning Mrs. Burgess, the cook, as to the food served on those fatal days; also the housemaid who had attended Madeleine in her sickness, the under-housemaid who had served and removed the trays sent up to her room, and the kitchenmaid who had washed up the utensils. For no matter how Dr. Pierce had hedged his statements, trying nobly to protect his friends and patrons from the innuendoes of the Court, he had been forced in the end to admit that Madeleine had expired from the ingestion of some noxious substance. What terrible mischance could have achieved so dread an outcome?

Everyone who had been in Long Basing that fatal day, or days, was summoned to the witness-box. My own ordeal had been quickly over, for I had been in London for some days when Madeleine first fell ill and, summoned by telegraph by Mrs. Poole, had arrived too late to bid my dearest friend farewell. Loyalties and resentments were revealed as one by one the servants gave their testimony—petty jealousies, for, as I have said, a governess is often in uneasy relationship with the domestic staff. An under-gardener who had been too familiar. The housemaid who had not cared for extra duties. And, strangest of all, the unsuspected presence of Blanche's one-time nurse, now wife to the village innkeeper, who had, unbeknown to us or to Lady Ogilvy, been a familiar visitor to the Servants' Hall, having formed a friendship with Mrs. Burgess. So little does the master know his man!

And then, despite the protests of Mr. Forbes, our lawyer, my faery was summoned to the box.

I can scarce describe it. For four long hours she stood there, pale and steadfast as an altar candle, clad in deepest black, her fair curls

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hidden beneath a bonnet whose black veil she had thrown back, her little hands in their black gloves clasped on the wooden rail before her. Once she faltered and seemed like to faint; but against the protests of our lawyer, she remained in the box, sipping a glass of water, her gaze fixed on the Coroner.

Had she visited the sickroom? Of course. Had she administered any substance? Of course not. What were her feelings for Miss Fenton? She loved her—and here her voice broke and her eyes filled with tears. Was Miss Fenton in the habit of taking patent medicines? She did not know—perhaps such as were in common use. Such as? Perhaps a cough mixture or something for headaches or to help—her pale cheeks flushed here—elimination. Cascara? Senna pods? Yes. Did Miss Fenton ever administer such things to her? Sometimes. But she came to no harm from them? Never.

Like terriers, the Coroner and Mr. Forbes fought out their battle, the one determined to intimidate the frail child in the box, the gist of his questioning ever more loathsomely clear, Mr. Forbes striving with all the energy at his command to open the field of speculation, to show how possible it would have been for Madeleine's death to lie at several doors but, likeliest of all, at none. Disgruntled servants—even the long-nourished rancour of Nurse Hodge, dismissed, as she no doubt felt, unfairly and supplanted first by Lady Ogilvy (whose death, the Coroner dared to imply in his infamous summing-up, might also bear investigation) and then by a charming governess—all were possible. Most possible of all to any but his warped sensibilities was that Madeleine had accidentally dosed herself not with some common panacea such as senna pods but one which contained some unsuspected lethal substance.

The torture ended. Despite the Coroner's outrageous summing-up, the stalwart jurymen brought in an Open verdict. It was not what I had hoped, but at least it stilled most tongues and lifted from us the foul burden of the public gaze. For five days we had lived in the ferocious glare of the yellow press, our words and actions reported in every detail, our visages sketched and reproduced across the page—for the spectacle of a young girl, beautiful and gently bred, made the centre of what, in all but name, came near a trial for murder was for the Press a Roman holiday.

Half-fainting, she clung to me as we fought our way to the carriage. In tears she lay in my arms as I bore her up to her room, the servants, whose characters had been so variously revealed, fluster-

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ing about us. At last she slept. And I, alone with my grief, could weep.

We shall leave Long Basing. It is entailed and cannot be sold, but tenants will be found and we shall never live here again. We shall live in my house in Holland Park, my faery and I, and put the past behind us.

I have a faithful staff, my work goes well. The dreadful events of the past months have not harmed my professional reputation, which is, I believe, secure. The world shall wound us no more, for I shall keep my faery safe. As she grows to womanhood she will still pose for me. Although she must lose the soft radiance of childhood, she will remain as sweet and winningly wilful as I have always known her. No doubt one day some handsome fellow will come to claim her from me. I dread that day, but pray I may be spared for many years to shield her from the fortune-hunters that I fear abound—for on my death, together with her Ogilvy inheritance, my faery will indeed be well endowed with this world's riches. But, as the Bard says, "Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold", and she is beautiful indeed, still with a childlike purity in her candid gaze.

I set all this down in the desperate hope of exorcising the dark memories of the past; to state the true facts as I understand them of that sad and singular sequence of events which resulted in so terrible an ordeal of suspicion and persecution; and to attest my deep and loving fidelity to my faery child, my Blanche.

Edward Augustus Steynes.

These papers were among the effects of Edward Augustus Steynes, A.R.A., seen but not used by the town Prosecuting Counsel in the trial of Blanche Clarissa Ogilvy, aged seventeen years, for his murder by laburnum poisoning, for which she was sentenced to death by Mr. Justice Talbot at the Old Bailey. The sentence was subsequently commuted to life imprisonment. It is thought she emigrated to Australia after her release.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

JEFFRY SCOTT

"And I useta think The Odd Couple *was comedy," Archie Magellan told the pristine Pete Tozer. Nobody would ever accuse Archie of being pristine. Though he had heard of it and was under the firm impression it was a place near Oxnard . . . He and Pete had teamed up in Rahway prison, longer ago than he cared to remember . . .*

AN HONEST JOB

by JEFFRY SCOTT

Pete Tozer, diminutive and cat-footed, was a great drifter-in on scenes. To be blunt, a born snoop.

Wondering how long his partner had been standing in the kitchen, Magellan levered himself off the floor. "Back to work," he announced loudly, adding as if noticing Tozer for the first time, "Shut my eyes for a second, is all. Rests 'em for the close work."

Tozer was screwing a small cigar home under his neat little moustache. "You can't return to a place you've never been, Archie."

Puffing himself up—easy enough, because at fifty-three years of age, Mrs. Magellan's black-sheep son seemed to be still growing—he growled, "You saying I'm idle, Pete?"

The other man dusted a worktop with his show handkerchief. Everything about him stayed pristine. His shirts never looked grubby and his nails repelled grime. "Idle doesn't even begin to touch it, Arch. Goof-off, goldbricker, work-shy, lazy, lethargic, suspected victim of sleeping sickness—those I'll entertain."

"And I useta think *The Odd Couple* was comedy." Archie Magellan folded his arms defiantly. Nobody would ever accuse him of being

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pristine. Though he had heard of it and was under the firm impression it was a place near Oxnard.

Right now his elephantine jeans descended in concertina folds and half the tail of a deplorably gaudy shirt trailed out at the back, something like the plumage of a dying fighting cock. His large hands were freckled with paint, but very little had yet made it as far as the kitchen's walls.

Knowing that Pete Tozer would have noted that while the paint can was open, the brush was still incriminatingly dry, Magellan grumbled, "*You* could give this a shot, you know. Okay, you're wearing yourself to a frazzle, roaming around here with that hokey magnifying glass and the books and so forth. Change is as good as a rest. You look peakit to me. I don't mind going out, hustle some business."

"We've *got* business." Pete blew a perfect smoke ring. He produced no other kind. Archie sneezed irritably.

"Our business is here. Mrs. Potter is paying us a surprising amount to decorate her kitchen. A six-hour job, tops, and you've been burning daylight for two whole days."

"I'm no damn painter!"

"This is true," his friend agreed waspishly. "You ought to do something about that, Arch. No big challenge. In fact, it's disarmingly simple: go paint."

Magellan was bad at taking orders. But he was even worse at starving to death, or—even more horrible concept—dying of thirst. Water or milk never entered his calculations over such a fate. And Pete Tozer, though world champion pain in the elbow at times, did have a knack of averting ordeal by abstinence.

Cursing steadily, Magellan began painting. Tozer slipped off the counter. "I'll be back later," he said. "Be sure to lock up if you go out. Flora Potter bent my ear about the valuables here. Items of the antique and *objet d'art* persuasion."

The apartment's front door snicked shut, followed by the distant hum of the elevator. Magellan's pace slowed at the all-clear signals, but then he sighed and carried on.

The kitchen window was open to take care of paint fumes and he could see a froth of foliage marking Central Park in the distance. Leaning out, he watched the brown toadstool that was Pete Tozer's hat moving steadily along Third Avenue, thirty or more floors below.

Magellan wasn't quite as dumb as he looked. Actually, he didn't

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look dumb at all—just a slob, not at all the same thing. His eyes narrowed in thought as the toadstool glided around a corner.

Tozer was up to something.

Archie hoped so, anyway, because he hated this experiment in so-far-honest toil. He loathed the work, detested the solitude, and wasn't delirious about the hardness of the quarry-tile floor in the kitchen, a hell of a daybed.

Further, he actively disliked one of the building's doormen, an almost comically virile-looking youth who, whenever he encountered Archie in the lobby, sneered theatrically and seemed to be on the verge of Saying Something.

All in all, Pete Tozer had better be up to something.

They'd teamed up in Rahway prison, longer ago than he cared to remember. Archie Magellan was uneasily sure that he and The Toze had hung out even before prison, when zoot suits were in style first time around.

Knocking over liquor stores, stealing cars, that Magellan could get behind. Conning hayseeds and rolling drunks, too. They'd *pretended* to be painters and maintenance men often enough. Or rather Pete Tozer had pretended, vocally, while Archie unloaded typewriters from government offices.

Magellan flexed his spine nostalgically, paintbrush poised and dribbling on his sneakers. Word-processors replacing typewriters wasn't his idea of progress: those mothers were like to rupture a guy.

There were still two and a half walls with abundant fiddly bits ahead.

The day wore on, Archie's fingers cramping, his back hurting from the bending. The paint made his eyes sting. A woman on a nearby balcony was playing heavy metal music at a volume suggesting she wanted it to reach her lover in Jersey. Magellan's taste stopped just a little bit after Sinatra's middle years.

Archie was a talker, and, denied company, he was willing to converse with himself. "Pete can be weird, but crazy he isn't. So there has to be an angle."

"Correct."

Magellan nearly went into cardiac arrest.

Back on his roost by the microwave oven, Pete Tozer was beaming. "You missed a teentsy patch under the window there. Otherwise A-O.K., Arch."

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"Why d'you pull this stuff? My heart's going nineteen to the dozen."

"Pity the rest of you can't match that speed." Tozer couldn't hack compassion. "I wanted to find out whether I could walk out of this place and get back in broad daylight without being seen."

Magellan hadn't been listening. "Pussyfooting around . . . I'm painting, already!"

"Well, stop it. We've got to get out of here. Quitting time. Julian DiSalvo's shift finishes soon, and he's *got* to see us go. Will power, Arch—my will, your power, and next stop's Easy Street."

"I wish you'd make up your mind," Magellan whined. "Paint, don't paint. Hurry up and start, stop right now. I can't keep up with you."

"It's half your charm, buddy," Tozer assured him. "Seriously, we've got to get out of here on the double. So we can get back in, ahead of Julian."

"Sure. Right. Dumb of me. To get here we got to go out. Listen, Toze, how about we don't go out? Then we'll get here super-fast."

Tozer blinked at him. "Very ingenious, Arch. *Sneak* back in, I should have said. We go downstairs and out, so we can *sneak* back. Like justice not only being done, but being seen to be done, that's how we leave. Only we come back like a D.A. on the take."

When they emerged in the lobby, Magellan still crossly dazed, lips moving silently as he grappled with the situation, his least favorite doorman glided over. "There's a service elevator and a service door out back for working people. People in work clothes."

It was a fair point. The lobby, fortunately free of residents at four in the afternoon, was affronted by Archie Magellan's very presence. Marble floors reflected exotic plants in cedar troughs, an illuminated fountain tinkled discreetly, stalactite chandeliers shimmered. The whole shooting match put Magellan in mind of a Las Vegas sporting house he'd been thrown out of in the early 1950s. All the same, he thought about decking the doorman.

To be accurate, little thought was involved. His fists knotted and one end of the barn-door shoulders dipped a fraction. He wasn't about to be sneered and glared at by a young punk masquerading as an admiral on the lam from a Busby Berkley musical.

Pete Tozer slipped between the two men. Grinning up at the doorman, he was at his most saccharine winsome. "Service door? No spit. We'll be sure to use it next time. It won't happen again, sir."

Shepherding the still-fuming Magellan along Third Avenue, he

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said chattily, "His name is Julian DiSalvo. I have this faint inkling you don't warm to him. But Flora Potter—"

"The dame that's paying us."

"Succinct, Arch. Mrs. Potter thinks the world of him. More than she does of Mr. Potter, who spends most of his time in Europe while she buys up items of the antique and *objet d'art* persuasion. At the present time, Julian is the main *objet* in Mrs. Potter's life."

Paradoxically, Archie Magellan loved soap operas but had a low threshold of acceptance for gossip. "I want this stuff, I'll catch *Days of Our Lives,*" he complained. "What's it got to do with us?"

Tozer nudged him down a narrow, sour-smelling slot between buildings, dank and dark despite the sunlight overhead. "Julian DiSalvo enjoys jumping on lonely ladies' bones, but his true love is money. What Julian wants, Flora wants. But from the papers I've studied in her inadequately locked bureau, Mrs. Potter is tapped out for the moment."

He stopped and pecked a forefinger into Magellan's grizzlybear belly. "Ponder this, sucker: she wants a grubstake, her collection could be worth big money, and she hires *us* to paint her kitchen. *Us,* Archie."

Magellan chewed his lip. He was angry—and somewhat scared.

Reading his face, Pete Tozer nodded grimly. "We've got records, you and me, there and back again. Julian DiSalvo came all the way over to the West Side last week, nosing around for somebody, anybody, who knows about slammers from the inside."

Magellan made a gunshot noise, slapping his forehead. "I thought I'd seen that nerd before! Cameron's Bar, last Friday. Dewars, straight up."

"Be that as it may, Julian was asking around and Cam dropped our names in exchange for ready cash. What Julian didn't grasp was that Cam works both sides of the street, and if there was still the El he'd be swinging off that, too. Naturally, as soon as Julian took off, Cam sold me the information that he'd been buying information."

Magellan charted the road ahead. "You mean she steals her own stuff, collects twice—insurance and whatever she can sell it for on the side—and we take the fall. Alone in her apartment. It'd play for any cop."

"It's your succinct day, Arch. Only Mrs. Potter's in Florida with her mother, getting a tan, not to mention an alibi. *Julian* does the removal. And I doubt whether she'll sell the things. The lady's a true collector."

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For some reason Pete Tozer was seething with good spirits and even amusement. It irked his partner. "So where does that leave us?"

"Outside the service door Julian was recommending just now." Tozer twinkled at the peeling, steel-sheathed slab blocking the end of the alley.

"No handle this side," he chirped. "For deliveries, Julian or an associate checks who comes in and sees that they leave empty-handed. Just to make sure, opening this door activates a TV monitor-screen in the lobby."

The runt was enjoying himself, Archie noted resignedly.

"However, a folded cigarette pack inserted from inside—as it might be by somebody apparently going to the laundry room but turning down the corridor nearby—keeps the door open a crack. We can pull it open from out here. But no more than halfway open so that the TV camera doesn't cut in. —You painted, Arch; I observed. I trust we can agree it was a fair division of labor."

His tone altered, sharpened. "Shoes off, now. And think thin."

The endless stairs were a contrast to the opulence out front—dusty, ill-finished concrete, stuffy gloom, the garbage chute rattling mysteriously or moaning at their elbows as they ascended.

"Okay, we jump him when he comes for the stuff," Archie panted. "But why tonight? It could be any time."

"Wrong. Today is Friday. Mrs. Potter gets back from Florida on Sunday. Julian's off duty tomorrow. There would be no excuse for his being here if he was seen. And, I repeat, today is Friday—the day he talent-spotted us, remember. Now, what happens on Fridays?"

"We get high." Magellan began to cheer up.

"A peak of our social calendar that hasn't escaped Julian DiSalvo. Late Friday, early Saturday, we'll be wrecked, with no ghost of a coherent alibi. Mrs. Potter 'discovers' the burglary Sunday. We've been here just enough days to register with other staff besides Julian. A nice frame." Tozer's admiration was genuine.

"Why the hell are we going back into the lion's den then, Toze?"

"Picture this, Archie. You and I return unexpectedly to finish that kitchen, being craftsmen who can't sleep right 'til the job's complete. We surprise El Creepo at his nefarious task, perform a citizen's arrest, and call in the management. Not the cops, notice, but the management. Black eye for their image, Arch. Employee Rips Off

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Resident While She's Away. They'll want to hush it up. So, when she gets back, will Mrs. Potter. She'll be anxious not to bring charges against Julian. If it reaches the police, he could open a positively disastrous can of worms for her, yes?"

Dusting a step with the show handkerchief, Tozer sat down for a breather. He smoothed his moustache, deftly neat as a mouse grooming itself. "Now that leaves us as the good guys who could, by dropping in and sharing life-experience with the cops or the *Daily News*, open the aforesaid can of worms. I predict a useful reward from the apartment management, seconded by Mrs. Flora Potter."

For the first time in their long relationship, Archie Magellan felt superior. And a shade worried and disappointed over his partner.

"You're not thinking right, Toze. Listen, Julian boosts that garbage from the showcase in the parlor and slides out the back way. We deep-six this citizen's arrest stuff, wait out in the alley, and hijack the loot. I see whether I can use him for cracking holes in the sidewalk, then we fence what he took."

Pete Tozer's gaze was opaque. "That would be *dishonest.*"

"Damn right. That's what we are. Aren't we?"

Pete patted his shoulder consolingly. "You're thinking again. Think some more. Apart from figuring us a way in here, why didn't I help you with the painting?"

"You're too smart is why. Why paint when you can tell me to?"

"Bite your tongue, you ingrate. I was too busy checking out the *objets d'art.*"

The phrase was grating on Magellan. "Garbage inna parlor," he corrected.

"If you will. Jade ornaments and ivory netsuke. It crossed my mind to get copies made, do a switch before Julian moved." Tozer clicked his tongue. "Crossed my mind and went right out the other side, Arch.

"I don't know what Mr. Potter does in Europe, but I'm certain what he does in leisure hours—and that's laugh at Mrs. Potter. She's assuming her collection is genuine, but I found I can't copy it—something to do with it having been copied already. From that photo she keeps by the bed, hypocritical hussy, Mr. Potter is one of us—a crook. Eyes far too close together."

Magellan frowned. "I'm getting my migraine again, Toze."

"Bear with me, old friend, all will be made clear. There's nothing to be gained by ripping off fakes. Maybe a broken leg for trying to con a fence, but that's hardly a bonus, right? Likewise, the insurance

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company won't pay a reward for recovery. All we'd achieve would "be revenge, and there's no taste in nothing. —Whereas in my scenario, we profit from the apartment management, plus our fee from Mrs. Potter—and if I firmly suggest another zero at the end, I doubt whether she'll feel in a position to argue. Flora Potter gets a sharp lesson, which she richly deserves for trying to railroad us back to That Place, we ruin Julian's day and probably the affair, and maybe hand the prudently absent Mr. Potter a few laughs."

He chortled fruitily and stood up, tugging creases from his jacket, abstractedly using the tail of Magellan's shirt to shine his shoes.

Archie hauled himself up. "You think you're pretty clever, huh?"

"What do you think?"

"I think you're pretty clever." Tackling the stairs again, Magellan began smiling. He was pondering the best way of announcing doom and retribution to Julian DiSalvo. Whatever his final decision, it was going to be a fun evening.

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a *NEW* Em Grady story by

JANE BOSWORTH

They were all the way to the Hopi Trading Post south of the Sedona crossroads before it dawned on Em how peculiar Jake's invitation was. She knew he had a gun collection, but she'd never known him to hunt . . .

HUNTIN' QUAIL

by JANE BOSWORTH

Sophie died this mornin'. Went out to feed an' water her an' found her lyin', stiff-legged, in the sand. Eyes wide open. Seein' nothin'. Couldn't bring myself to have her hauled away so I hired me a man to dig a grave an' bury her. She was my Elmer's burro an' she's been a grievin' ever since he passed away. Reckon they're together now somewhere in the great Mohave.

Told myself I weren't gonna cry no more an' I didn't. I sat in my rockin' chair on the porch a the rock shop me an' Elmer run for better than thirty years an' mulled over the happy years. Watched the sun set an' the moon rise. Listened to the coyotes yappin' an' heard the first stirrin's a the night critters.

Got plum tired a sitting.

"Em," I says to myself, "you got to quit mildewing an' get to stirrin'. Poutin' ain't a healthy feelin'."

'Bout that time, I seen the headlights of a car comin' down the highway. Car turned into my driveway an' parked in front a the shop. I knowed who it was 'fore he ever got outta that fancy Mercedes.

"Em," I says to myself, "what do you s'pose the gigolo a the senior citizens' set wants with the likes a you?"

'Fore I coulda answered, Jake McEwan eased outta his car an' come a struttin' up onto my porch. Danged iffen that man ain't agin'

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well. Still lean an' tall, white hair wavin' onto a weathered forehead. A Old Salt's smile that gets them blue eyes a his to snappin'. Wrinkles just make him look wise.

"Emily. Sweet, sweet Emily." The words sugared offa his tongue. "Why are you looking so despondent?"

"Buried Sophie today. Seems like death keeps on a coming for them I care for. They's a sadness to bein' left behind."

Ain't never unloaded my sorrows on Jake before an' I weren't sure how he'd take it. Kept my eyes on a spider webbing in the crook a the porch. Felt Jake's hand start kneading my shoulder.

"Emily—" his voice was kind "—you need company. Pack a bag and come away with me for a few days. I'm hungering for fresh quail and the company of a pleasant hunter like yourself. What do you say, dear?"

Seen a moth fly right into that web an' I watched that spider pounce on it. Reckoned that Jake was a webbin' some kinda trap for me too, but the ache a my aloneness was too much to bear. I said I'd go.

"Wonderful," Jake said. "And pack yourself a dress. If we don't bag any birds, I'll buy you some quail under glass at the El Bayou."

"I ain't fancy enough for a place like that."

I looked up an' seen a softness on his face. "Emily," he said. "I do get so tired of fancy women."

Reckon them words spurred me into action. I went inside, packed me a bag, grabbed Old Betsy an' a box a bird shot, an' headed outta the shop, lockin' the door behind me. Jake was busy tyin' down one a them covers over his Mercedes.

"Mighta knowed it'd be my gas, Jake McEwan," I said. "You ain't changed a bit."

A look a pure hurt drifted across his face. Then anger took its place.

"Emily, we will need a four-wheel-drive jeep for hunting on open rangeland. There is no reason to take two cars. And I wouldn't think of letting you buy the gas. Do you think I'd take advantage of you?"

"Reckon I weren't thinkin' a'tall. Reckon I was fixin' to share the hurt I got bottled up inside. I'm sorry to a said that."

The anger melted right offa his face. "I understand," he said.

No nicer words coulda been spoke.

We loaded my gear into the back a Lizzy an' Jake set a couple a burlap sacks aside it, got inside an' I drove. Headed up Highway

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89A to Sedona. Got all the way to the Hopi Trading Post south a the Sedona crossroads 'fore it dawned on me how peculiar Jake's invite were. I knowed he had hisself a gun collection, but I ain't never knowed Jake to hunt.

"Turn left at the next light," Jake said. "Then follow the road to where it dead-ends."

The road trailed through a tract a new stucco houses. Each house was a settin' on a quarter-acre lot an' most a them had barred windows an' signs warnin' folks 'bout their dogs. Funny, I knowed most a them people is refugees from California cities, but you'd a thought they'd feel safe in Sedona. Ain't much crime here. A rash of gun thefts lately is all.

Jake had hisself one a them clapboard houses settin' in the middle of a acre a land. Didn't have no bars on the bay windows in the front an' didn't have no dogs. I parked Lizzy in the garage like Jake told me to an' eased on outta her. Jake got my bag an' Old Betsy an' stood still, thinkin'. They's just enough moonlight on his face for me to see that somethin' was troublin' him.

"Jake," I says, "I got me the smarts a the cactus wren when it comes to stayin' outta the cat's paws, an' you been pussy-footin' me 'bout quail huntin'. Maybe you best tell me why I'm here."

Jake, he leaned over an' pecked me on the lips.

"Emily—" his voice was soft "—I have need of a woman like you."

Danged iffen that didn't fluster my feet into movin'. I walked up the driveway, up the back stairs, into the kitchen, through the swingin' doors, an' found myself in the livin' room. Then I put on the brakes.

"Whoa there, Em," I says to myself. "In the forty-odd years you an' Jake's been friends, has he ever sweet-talked you lessen he wanted somethin'? An' they's somethin' 'bout quail. Somethin' you oughta remember."

But I'd be danged iffen I could so I figured to nose around a bit. Started by pokin' round the room. Ain't never seen a room with more fancies. Chippendale couches an' matchin' chairs. A gold-leaf coffee table with a scarred-up cigar box lookin' mighty outta place settin' on it. I opened the lid an' seen four pairs a handcuffs with four keys. Must a been antiques. I closed the lid an' moseyed over to this gun cabinet settin' where the moonlight beamed in through the windows. Must a been thirty pistols inside a the glass, settin' on black velvet, ten to a shelf. Pepperboxes, they was. Cooper. Allen an' Thurber. Cogswell. Mariette Brevette. Names on them breeches

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read like a *Who's Who* a early gun makers. I recollected Jake sayin' he had a collection he loaned to museums, but I never knowed how fine a collection it were.

"That, my dear Emily, is our quail bait." Jake's voice liked to startled me outta a year's growth. I spun round an' stared at him. Then what I was tryin' to recollect 'bout quail come home to me. Burglars. That left the top knot of a quail behind as a callin' card.

"The *Chronicle* published a story on my collection," Jake continued. "They ran photographs of my rarest guns. Of course, I made it a point to mention that the collection will be shipped out for Los Angeles tomorrow. Not that it will be.

"Emily, I believe a local is behind the gun thefts in Sedona. And I figure it's someone with a collection so fine he must steal what he needs or hire someone else to steal it. These are very selective burglaries."

"I ain't gettin' mixed up in that. I come here to bag me some quail an' that's all I aim to do."

"There's a fifty-thousand-dollar reward being offered for the return of a set of priceless Murdocks stolen from Ian McLaughlin last week."

"I got me plenty a money. I don't need—"

"Emily, those guns were heirlooms passed down from father to son for four generations. They had a set of rubies set into the butts—rubies given to Ian's grandfather's great great grandfather by Charles II of England. No one has the right to steal heirlooms. Heirlooms are cherished not because of their value but because of the loved ones who owned them."

Reckon he was right 'bout that. Got me a few things Elmer treasured. Ever'time I look on one of them, my Elmer steps into my mind. Don't pain me no more to see him there. Just brings me a feelin' a warmth an' comfort like he was a waitin' somewhere for me. Nobody's got the right to steal that kind a comfort.

"What's you got in mind, Jake?"

"I figure on catching our thief or thieves and then scaring the truth out of them."

"Reckon I gotta hear this," I said an' set down to listen.

Jake's plan was full a ifs. If them varmits come tonight. If we caught them. If they scared easy . . . We had us a great framework but we couldn't do nothin' till somethin' happened. Plumb loco it was, but I liked it.

"What do you say, Emily?" Jake asked.

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"Reckon we best take turns standin' watch so's we can both catch us forty winks. Since this is your idear, you get the first watch."

Jake stood an' give me one a his stage bows.

"Lady," he said, "my bedroom is the first door on the left. Just follow the hallway. It is so nice of you to consent to join this lonely old bachelor."

"I ain't no soiled dove, Jake McEwan. I reckon you best mind your Ps an' Qs round me."

"Emily, I would not think of doing otherwise."

It felt mighty strange lyin' on Jake's bed with my clothes on an' him sittin' outside the door with a .357 Magnum in his hands. Took me the longest time to doze off. Got to dreamin' 'bout chasin' quail through sagebrush. A hand on my shoulder woke me up.

"Emily," Jake whispered. "I think I heard something."

I listened an' heard the thumpin' of pipin' an' the creakin' a cold settlin' in.

Then I heard somethin' that sounded like wood rubbin' on wood.

"The gun cabinet's warped," Jake whispered.

I eased offa the bed an' grabbed Old Betsy. Jake opened the door an' motioned me to go round back through the kitchen.

House was dark enough to bring little white dots to my eyes. I finger-walked along the wall into the kitchen, eased through them swingin' doors, an' stopped where I could see the doorway into the hall. They was in here, all right—two a them, standin' in the moonlight 'side a Jake's gun cabinet. Long-hairs they was. Big one was bearded. 'Minded me of a prospector 'fore he got his Saturday night bath. Little one weren't much bigger than one a them jockeys. They was rummagin' through Jake's guns, pickin' 'em over like they was lookin' for somethin'.

I seen a shadowy figure in the hallway an' I knowed Jake was hoverin' there. Then I seen a flash a fire an' heard a ear-bustin' crack. Both a them thieves fell face down to the floor.

"He shot 'em!" the words slammed into my mind. "Dang him, how is we ever gonna learn the truth from dead men?"

But then I seen one a them inchin' forward. Other one was still as death. Jake stepped out into the room.

"Gentlemen," he said, "keep your noses on the floor and put your hands behind your backs. I never miss twice."

I heard the click of a cylinder rollin' forward an' both a the men tensed up an' did like Jake said.

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"Grady," Jake said. "Cover me. If they even breathe differently, shoot them."

I cocked Old Betsy an' sighted down her. Jake, he stepped in behind the men, took handcuffs outta that cigar box, an' cuffed each a them. Then he forced the big man's hand open, took somethin' outta it, an' stuffed it in his pocket. "Grady," he said. "It looks like we bagged the quail burglars."

Then he done somethin' that made no sense a'tall. He took two strips a black velvet outta that gun case an' blindfolded both a them men. I come closer an' he finger-motioned me not to talk.

"Gentlemen," he said. "There are two blanks and three .357 Magnum shells chambered in my gun. Would you like to indulge yourselves in a little game of Russian roulette?"

He spun the cylinder round. It made a clickin' sound. Then he pressed the muzzle against the back of the little man's head. The man started to whimper.

"Shut up, Mike," the big man said.

"He's crazy, Moose. He's—"

"Shut. Up."

"If you don't answer my question, Mike—" Jake's voice was low an' even "—I'll squeeze the trigger."

The little man started shakin'.

"Who's your fence?" Jake asked.

"Moose? Moose!"

"He's a cop, damn it. Keep quiet. He won't do it."

"Moose, I don't wanna die. I—"

Jake squeezed the trigger. The gun jumped in his hand. The little man screamed an' fell silent.

"Mike!" the big man shouted. "You all right?"

"He fainted," Jake said and stepped over to the big man. He spun the cylinder again and pressed the nose of the gun to the back of his head. "The odds are three to one you'll get the real thing, Moose." Jake's voice was low an' evil. "Do you like to play the odds?"

"His name is Harris," Moose said. "Lives in a mansion just north of town."

"Which mansion?" Jake asked.

"The one with the clump of prickly pear lining the driveway. I don't know the address, man."

"How and when do you deliver the guns?"

"We go to his house. To the French doors beside the rose garden.

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He hands us the money for the guns. We're supposed to be there at five."

"Who else lives at the mansion?"

"He lives alone."

"Servants?"

"Only day help. He's weird, man. Won't let nobody stay on the place. Flies in and out in this plane he keeps out back of the place."

The little man moaned his awakeness. Jake stepped around them an' nodded for me to leave the room. I walked into the hall an' waited.

"Gentlemen," I heard him say. "My partner is going to keep you covered while I check out your story. For your sakes, I hope I have heard the truth."

"I'll have your badge for this," the big man said.

"That, Moose, will be hard to do," Jake said an' stepped into the hall.

He grabbed my elbow an' walked me into the bedroom.

"Don't say a thing, Emily. Just grab your things and go out the back door."

I done like he said an' he followed along behind. He didn't take nothin' 'cept that gun a his. We made a beeline to Lizzy an' lit on outta there. Got all the way to Highway 89A 'fore it dawned on me that them two men might not stay still.

"What iffen them men don't stay in the house?" I asked him.

"Emily, have you ever tried to open a locked door with your teeth? I assure you they will not escape. As soon as we have the Murdocks, I shall phone the sheriff to report a break-in at my address."

We kept drivin' north till we come to a driveway with prickly pear clumped along it. I turned in an' parked Lizzy in behind that cactus. House was 'bout a hundred yards in. Looked like one a them Southern mansions. They's some kind a fancy sportscar parked in front a it an' they was lights on inside a set a French doors beside a garden. Our man was there, all right, but we was two hours early.

Jake slid outta Lizzy an' grabbed one of the burlap sacks outta the back. I figured he was gonna bust in there an' scare them guns outta whoever was inside, so I grabbed Old Betsy. Jake didn't have no gun.

"Put her back," he said. "Go up to the front door and ring the doorbell. When he answers, I'll break in. The guns are probably on display somewhere inside."

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"What iffen he don't answer the door? What iffen you can't find them guns?"

"We will face that if and when it happens."

Jake was on his way 'fore I coulda told him his plan was loco, so's I headed for the front door. He was pussy-footin' 'mongst the clay pots in the garden an' I was all the way to where I could see that were a Porsche parked in the driveway when I heard a loud crash an' the sound a clay breakin'. Light come on in the garden an' I seen Jake lift hisself offa the ground an' run for cover behind a pair a naked statues. Then them French doors opened an' this duded-up man come creepin' out. The gun he were carryin' didn't look like no antique, neither.

"Who's there!" he shouted.

Then he started toward them statues. T'weren't no cover twixt Jake an' them statues—nothin' but spindle-bare roses. They was only three steps away from bein' face to face.

"Yoo-hoo," I shouted an' waved. "Over here!"

The man eased on over close enough so's I could see that was a smokin' jacket he was wearin' an' a Luger he was aimin' at me.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Car broke down couple miles back. Been searchin' for a light so's I could get me a tow truck called. Saw your light from the road an' turned in. I don't mean no harm, Mister."

He got close enough for me to see the pockmarks on his cheeks. Ugly little man, he were. Flesh clung to his bones the way it does to a sickly body. "Who's with you?" he asked.

"Not a soul."

His eyes shifted from me to the house and back.

"You're lying. Something broke in the garden."

Just then a coyote yapped at the moon an' another one answered.

"Coyotes," I said. "Seen one sneakin' cross your drive. Reckon I scared it into your garden."

That seemed to ease him down some.

"Mind pointin' that gun somewhere's else, Mister? Makes me plumb nervous. I gotta watch the ticker, y'know?"

He let the nose fall toward the ground an' kinda eyed me like he didn't know what to do 'bout me. I looked back over his shoulder an' seen Jake sneak on into the house. I rocked on my feet an' stumbled 'gainst the Porsche.

"You all right, lady?" he asked.

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"Reckon I'm just tuckered."

"Come over and sit."

He grabbed my arm an' helped me over to the steps an' set me down.

"What are you doing out here anyway?" he asked.

"I'm on my way to Flagstaff. My daughter had herself my first grandson. Son-in-law called an hour ago to tell me an' I headed over. But Lizzy, she don't run so good sometimes. Up an' quit on me."

The man looked at his glowing watch. "You can't stay here, lady."

"Didn't figure on it. Iffen you'll call me a tow truck, I'll mosey on back to Lizzy an' wait there. Will you do that for me?"

"Sure. Sure."

I thanked him, got up, an' walked on down the driveway. Looked back an' didn't see him. Then I seen a flash a light comin' from his car an' heard somebody shut the door. I thought maybe he was gonna drive my way, so I ducked behind the prickly pear. When I heard footsteps runnin' past me, I headed for Lizzy an' sure enough Jake was waitin' inside a her when I got there. I eased in behind the wheel. We heard a car start an' tires yelpin' on cement. Lights flashed past us an' the Porsche roared down the highway. I started Lizzy up.

"Go north," Jake said. "Toward Flagstaff. I have us a room there. Stop at the first gas station you come to. I have to make a phone call."

I done like he said an' Jake got out an' made the call. I figured he was callin' the sheriff to let him know 'bout the break-in.

When he got back in, we drove on into Flagstaff. Jake had us a suite at the Flagstaff Inn. Told me we'd been there two days—had to stay over whilst I got over a virus.

He turned on the lights an' set my things in my bedroom. Then he took the Murdocks outta that burlap sack he was carryin'. Prettiest guns I ever seen. Scrolled an' engraved with a ruby set in each butt. Once I seen that he got what he come for, I went on into bed an' went to sleep.

I woke up 'bout noon an' went out into the livin' room. Jake was listenin' to the news on TV an' countin' money into two sacks. Didn't see how he coulda gotten no reward that fast an' I told him so.

"Emily," he said, "we shall never see that reward. I mailed the guns to McLaughlin this morning."

"Then what's—?"

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"Shh. Listen."

TV showed that fancy little man being brought outta Jake's house by the sheriff. Then them two burglars was brought out. TV announcer come on to say how these men was caught after an anonymous tipster alerted the sheriff to a possible break-in there. Seems the sheriff found two bags a pure cocaine under the front seat a the duded man's Porsche. A later search of his home revealed two million dollars' worth a the stuff.

"One for you," Jake said an' put a hundred-dollar bill on a stack. "One for me. One for you . . ."

"Jake McEwan, is they somethin' you forgot to tell me?"

He finished his countin' an' grinned at me.

"Where'd you get that money, Jake?"

"Your share is fifty-one thousand, five hundred dollars. Not bad for snaring a few quail."

"You best stop rilin' me an' start to jawin'."

"Emily, the money was stacked in a briefcase on our fence's desk, and beside the briefcase were six plastic bags of what appeared to be white powder. I simply put two and two together and came up with a drug dealer. So I relieved him of his cash and two bags of cocaine. I wrote a note telling him where his property could be found and left the topknot of a quail in the briefcase. Then I retrieved the Murdocks from the wall where they were mounted and left. I stashed the cocaine under the front seat of his Porsche. It was a remarkably good plan, don't you think? And to think that my house was broken into while we were here in Flagstaff. What is the world coming to, Emily?"

Jake was all puffed up with pride. False pride, it were. Had me a few questions that woulda busted his pride iffen he didn't figure out a way to weasel under 'em. Like how'd he know whose Porsche was a settin' out front a that mansion? But I knowed Jake well enough to figure he'd outfox me on questions like that, so I slung one at him I didn't think he could worm outta. Figured he'd forgotten.

"What 'bout my quail, Jake McEwan?"

Seen a look a one-upsmanship settle on his face. Then his laugh lines deepened an' that Old Salt's smile took its rightful place.

"Dear sweet Emily." Jake's voice was too kind. "Ours is too profitable a relationship to endanger with forgotten promises. We shall dine at eight, my dear."

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a distinguished reprint by

JULIAN SYMONS

"I might be able to manage a weekend," Victor said.
"Only a weekend?"
"Even that would be difficult."
"I love you."
"I love you, too."
"Then you'll manage it. Somehow."
"I want to, you know that. Look, Caroline—I've got a wife, you've got a husband. How about them?"
"They can pair off if they want to," she said, giggling as though she were drunk. He looked at her without smiling . . .

THE LAST TIME

by JULIAN SYMONS

Caroline Amesbury had been married for three years before she had her first walk out with a man. She had somehow never regarded such a thing as even a possibility, and she said so when a young man at a party whose dark hair curled attractively over his collar made his feelings and intentions unmistakable, and when she realized with astonishment that her own wishes matched his.

When he laughed and said that there was always one safe place in a house or a flat she didn't understand him, and not until he followed her into a dark room and slid a bolt did she realize that she was in what everybody she knew called a loo. What followed was brief but pleasurable, and part of the pleasure rested in the sense she had that for him she was a desired object, not a person. The very brevity and detachment of the thing was its charm, and

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when half an hour later he waved his hand, said, "See you," and went off with the girl he had brought to the party, she knew that she would never see him again.

So that was her first walk out—which was the out-of-date but somehow appropriate term she used, for how could you solemnly call it *adultery?* The first and the last time, she told herself, although she knew that this would not be true. The truth was that life with Bernard bored her. He had given her a pleasant house in what he called the nicest part of town and she thought of as the suburbs, and all the devotion she could have asked for, and they were not enough.

Indeed, it seemed to her at times that she didn't want any of the things so carefully provided. It did not help that when she expressed discontent, Bernard was immediately sympathetic and encouraged her to get the part-time job with a magazine that was an inadequate substitute for children. She was astonished when the chairman of the electronics firm in which Bernard was the general manager said that they valued above all things his decisiveness, for it often seemed to her that she was married to a rubber sponge.

She didn't say these things to other people. After the chairman's visit, Bernard told her he had been full of praise for her skill as a hostess and her charm as a woman. "He said I ought to look after you carefully and I told him that I certainly meant to," he said with the boyishly modest laugh she had once adored and now found so irritating. When he put his hand on hers and said, "I do know how lucky I am, darling," she could have screamed, although in fact she smiled and said she was glad to have met with the chairman's approval. Later she looked at the small delicate face framed in blonde hair that the mirror reflected back at her and wondered what the chairman would say if he knew the things she did. But nobody knew. She told nobody, except, of course, Jane.

Jane had been with her at the conventional, moderately grand girls' boarding school Caroline had attended, a figure increasingly seen as absurd as she dashed down the field the wrong way at lacrosse or found difficulty in lacing up the ghastly shoes they had to wear. Only in the school plays did Jane shine. At first she played awkward masculine parts like Tony Lumpkin, but she showed an unexpected flexibility of speech and style, and by the end of Caroline's schooldays had graduated to Lady Macbeth.

Well, that was Jane, who had come home with her often at school holidays. These were always rather a drag because Caroline's mother had died when she was small and her father, a Colonel in

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the Royal Engineers, often made it clear that he had not much use for a girl around the house. He had tried to teach her to ride and to shoot, and had even given her when she was sixteen a little ladies' revolver which after his death and her marriage to Bernard she kept in her memory drawer, but she had simply been no good at riding or shooting or any country pursuit.

Her father was not very kind about Jane. He invented a little rhyme which went "Caroline is perfectly fine, but poor old Jane's just a pain," which simply maddened Caroline. And after he had married again—a woman who was only ten years older than his daughter—he became totally absorbed with his new wife so that it was a relief to slope off into the woods that bounded the estate with Jane, and have long talks in the semi-darkness of the trees about things like the beastliness of her father and the things he got up to with his wife Heather. Jane was prudish and easily shocked by these conversations. Sometimes Caroline became more outspoken than she would otherwise have been—because if she admitted it to herself, the marriage had upset her—just to annoy her friend. And Jane wasn't very pleased when Caroline broke the news about Bernard. Her face took on what Caroline thought of as her cow look, obstinate and silly.

"But, Carol," she said, "he sounds quite nice, but I mean—" She stopped, and Caroline could not make her go on.

In the end she said it herself. "He's not our class. That's what you mean, isn't it?"

"Well, Carol, since you say so. I mean, he didn't even get to a grammar school."

That send her round the bend. "God, how snobbish can you be? Compared with most of the men I meet, Bernard's tough, hard, he knows what he wants. That's what I expect of a man. And you don't know what he's like, you've never even met him."

At that, Jane, obstinate cow Jane, just looked down at the ground, and said like somebody pronouncing a death sentence, "I hope you'll be happy. But I don't believe Bernard's the sort of person you say he is."

Jane was obviously upset by the marriage, because after it she did not put in an appearance for—how long?—oh, for eighteen months. And by that time Caroline had reluctantly to admit that she had been right. Bernard wasn't what she had believed. He was not tough but humble, aware of the honor done him by moving several steps up the social scale and by having a wife like Caroline.

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When they discovered that she couldn't have a child because of some strange tangled-up condition of her ovaries, and she wept and wept as it seemed for weeks, he was endlessly tolerant. He understood, understood only too well, when she got depressed and had blinding headaches. At the office he didn't push himself forward as she thought he should, although he did advance almost imperceptibly up to the position of general manager. Altogether, he was one of nature's rubber sponges.

Jane had been so beastly about Bernard that Caroline was determined to keep her away from him. This determination wasn't changed by the discovery, when she turned up again after the lapse of eighteen months, that Jane had now taken to wearing mannish clothes and was obviously less prepared to be Caroline's doormat than she had been in the past. It was with something like a sneer that Jane asked how things were going, and almost with brutality that she said, "So the working-class boy didn't come up to scratch."

Caroline felt at once the instinct to defend him. "He's nice, I won't let you say anything against Bernard. It isn't Bernard—it's me. I mean, I'm an awful bitch, I don't think I ought to have got married." Jane smiled slightly, reacting only when Caroline said gloomily, "I believe I'm frigid."

"You're not frigid," Jane said angrily. "Don't you believe it." Although of course she didn't know.

Anyway, it was Jane she told about the young man at the party, and about the others. Once she had understood that little walk outs were possible, and that if they were managed discreetly Bernard need not know about them—for she did like Bernard, faithful St. Bernard, and even though he sometimes bored her she wouldn't have wanted to hurt him—they became more frequent. The revelation that had come to her through the young man with dark, attractively curling hair was that all you needed was a room with a door that locked.

It wasn't necessary to remove your clothes, and even a bed was not necessary. In fact, she didn't particularly care for lying on a bed. The exciting thing was to have the whole thing over as quickly as possible. It was slightly like taking a dose of medicine—she wanted it to happen and at the same time wanted to get it over. She became adept at making signals that men at a drinks party or a dinner party understood, and after that the routine didn't vary greatly. The rather lavish lunch a few days later, the invitation, the acceptance,

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the room, the act. And after the act? Well, after the act was, as they said in the old books, a letdown. Sometimes she quite literally and disconcertingly could not understand what she had been doing in a room with a part-naked hairy-legged man who looked at her strangely. They would get dressed, often without speaking, she would leave the man's flat or the hotel in which he had booked a room, and that little walk out would be over. —The last time, she would say to herself as she hurried home to Bernard, that's positively the last time. Apart from anything else, there was the chance that he would find out. She tried to be as careful as possible, and to confine herself to men she met through her office work, but there were two who knew them socially and had actually come to their house. Bernard looked at her very oddly sometimes, and she wondered if he suspected or even knew, but his invariably gentle manner towards her did not change.

Discussing the whole thing with Jane, Caroline put the question: was she a nymphomaniac? They talked in Caroline's bedroom, when Bernard was at the office. Jane had now taken to smoking small cigars, which she chewed on like a man. She snorted like a man, too, as she said that Caroline was talking rubbish.

"First you say you're frigid, now you're a nympho. I'll tell you what's the trouble with you, my girl. You just haven't met the right man." And Jane spat, actually spat, as though she were the right man herself.

"Do you think it's really that? I just don't know anything any more." Caroline to her dismay found herself crying. Jane made consoling noises.

After she had gone, Caroline realized that the room stank of cigar smoke and opened the windows, but Bernard's sense of smell was acute and almost as soon as he opened the door he asked who had been there. When she said nobody—for Bernard had never met Jane and it would have been too difficult to tell him about her—he became, for Bernard, quite annoyed. He said that somebody had smoked a cigar and actually went round looking for the butt, which fortunately she had put into the garbage disposal. But his suspicions didn't seem to be allayed—he kept looking strangely at her for the whole evening.

It was in the following week that she met Victor, and went with him to a hotel, and lay down there with him upon a bed, and knew that this was something new and different in her life and not just another walk out. Victor was a media man in an advertising agency,

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and she met him at a conference. At the conference he was easy and smiling but masterful, and later on when he took her to lunch and asked about herself and her life, he did so like somebody genuinely interested and not just a man trying to make a pretty woman. She felt herself flowering under the warmth of his sympathy.

In almost every respect he was unlike her previous walk outs. He was ten years older than she, whereas they had all been younger, and he looked his age, with streaks of grey in his dark hair and vertical lines of care marking his face. He was married and had two children, whose pictures he carried in his wallet. If somebody else had told her about Victor, she might have thought him fairly dismal, but in fact he had the total composure of somebody who knew exactly what he wanted, and when. On this first meeting, he didn't touch her, did not even kiss her goodbye, but arranged another lunch date. The next time they met in the lounge of the biggest hotel in the city and he said simply, "I don't think we want lunch, do we? I've kept the cab," and they went straight to a small hotel. He made love with a mixture of force and tenderness, telling her exactly what to do but with a concern also for pleasing her. Such a concern was unknown to Bernard or to the walk outs, so that the whole thing was not at all like taking medicine. When it was over, she wept and kissed his hand. She did not think of hurrying home to Bernard and it was Victor eventually who looked at his watch, said that he must put in an appearance at the office, and arranged to meet her in three days' time. The second time, she had the same feeling of fulfillment, and she knew that her life was changed.

She found herself reluctant to tell Jane about Victor, but that perceptive remark about not having found the right man made her do so. But Jane—who had become a rather objectionable confidant, always sneering and contemptuous—was concerned, as she might have expected, to belittle Victor. Caroline protested. She really had met the right man.

"I daresay. But are you the right woman? Just take a look in the glass." Caroline did so. Certainly there was something hectic and strained about her appearance. Jane went on jeeringly, "You're not so bad now, but you should see yourself sometimes."

Caroline snapped back. "It's better than looking and behaving like a man. You want to look at *yourself*. You're—well, almost a freak."

"Let me tell you something. Within a month he'll have said good-

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bye. Given you the push. And what will our pretty Caroline do then, poor thing?"

"He's not *like* that," Caroline almost screeched.

"Isn't he? If I met him, I'd tell him a few things."

"I'll tell *you* something," Caroline said more calmly. "You never will."

She felt that she had won the argument, but she was still upset by it. That evening Bernard asked if she felt all right, and when she said yes, he talked about going away for a holiday. In the next breath he added, "I know I often get on your nerves. I don't mean to, but I do. Anyway, I couldn't manage to get away just now. I thought a couple of weeks on your own, down in Devon or Cornwall perhaps—"

"Yes," she said. "Oh, yes—what a wonderful idea." She saw the prospect of two whole weeks with Victor. Belatedly she added, "Of course, I'd like it if you could come."

Bernard looked sad and petulant as he said truthfully that she didn't want him.

On the next day she was so excited that she telephoned Victor at his office, something he had told her never to do. His voice on the telephone was neutral, guarded, as he agreed to meet her the next day. They went straight to the hotel and there he was coldly angry, unmoved by tears.

"I'm sorry, but I was so excited. I had to tell you, don't you see?"

"You must have known I can't come away with you just like that." She didn't reply. "You must realize it's impossible."

To check the hateful words, she dragged him onto the bed and started to take off her clothes. Later, he said, "I might be able to manage a weekend."

"Only a weekend?"

"Even that would be difficult."

"I love you."

"I love you, too."

"Then you'll manage it. Somehow."

"I want to, you know that. Look, Caroline—"

"Yes."

"I've got a wife, you've got a husband. How about them?"

"They can pair off if they want to," she said, giggling as though she were drunk. He looked at her without smiling.

That was Friday. On Tuesday they met again, and she told him

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that she was going the following Saturday to a little village in South Devon. She traced a finger on his chest, which was covered with grey hair. "When will you come?"

"I don't think I can."

"But you said you would."

"I said I'd try. It's going to be too difficult." She tugged at the grey hair. "Don't do that, Caroline. I think we ought to stop seeing each other."

She stared at him, amazed, horrified. "Why?"

"I think we should, that's all. I don't want Monica to find out, you don't want Bernard to know."

"But I don't care," she said. "I'll tell him, I want to tell him."

He was putting on his shirt and tie, and spoke with his back to her. "If you think I'm going to tell Monica, you're a fool." He turned, saw her stricken face, spoke gently. "I'm sorry, Caro. But you must see. This had better be the last time."

At that she cried out and wept and pleaded, until he agreed to see her on Friday, the day before she went. He brushed aside her thanks. "It won't make any difference." But there he was wrong.

It was impossible for her to tell Bernard, so she told Jane. And then the memory of those earlier words came back to her, about meeting Victor and telling him a few things.

He was waiting for her in the little lounge of the hotel and he didn't comment on her appearance until they were in the bedroom. Then he said, "What in God's name have you been doing to yourself?"

"That's not the right question, is it? The question is, what are you going to do with Caroline?"

"I don't understand you." He really did look bewildered.

"Are you going away with her?"

"I—please—"

"You're not. I can tell you that here and now."

"Why are you dressed like that?"

"Dressed like what?" she asked contemptuously. She took out and lighted a small cigar while he watched her, astonished. Then she deliberately drew from her trousers pocket the little revolver that had been for so long in her memory drawer. He just had time to stammer out some incoherent words when she began to shoot.

The noise in the small room was very loud, and there was a lot of smoke. She was still a bad shot, and one of the bullets struck the long looking-glass, so that broken glass mixed with blood on the

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floor. The strip of glass remaining showed a grotesque figure, evidently feminine but wearing bell-bottom trousers, a double-breasted jacket, and a cap that contained the fair hair piled on her head. A cigar stuck out of the figure's mouth, making it look like a ventriloquist's dummy.

When the police came, this figure was nursing in her arms the head of the dead man. She spoke to the police quite coherently. She told them that her name was Jane and refused to give a surname. She had shot the man because of his behavior to her friend Caroline Amesbury. "She wanted him to go on, but he'd had enough. Nobody does that to Caroline—not while I'm around."

One of the policemen had been looking through her bag. He showed something to the sergeant, who nodded. He said formally, "Caroline Jane Amesbury, I am taking you into custody on a charge of—"

The two other policemen in the room watched fascinated as the ventriloquist's dummy shrieked, leapt at the sergeant like a cat, and brought him to the ground. Before they could drag her off and handcuff her, she had torn his cheek badly with her nails and bitten his ear almost through. Later the hospital put five stitches in it.

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congratulate
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whose stories have been nominated for an EDGAR
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CLARK HOWARD ("Puerto Rican Blues," *EQMM*, April 1983)
SIMON BRETT ("Big Boy, Little Boy," *EQMM*, Mid-July 1983)
RUTH RENDELL ("The New Girl Friend," *EQMM*, August 1983)
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a *NEW* Sergeant Bullock story by

JAMES POWELL

"Boys, look who's dropped in for a bite," called Lucy di Lammermoor, opening the door. Eight yapping Pekinese tumbled into the room. Six hemmed in Bullock's feet. The other two leaped from floor to wing chair to mantel and menaced his throat. "What's that, boys?" said Lucy. "You don't want me to wrap him, you'll eat him here?" She smiled brightly. "No, you clever little beasts know the rules. Touch not unless he moves."

Poor Maynard Bullock, once again in need of an ingenious plan fast. It seems to us that even James Bond never had it so bad so often . . .

THE POLYGON FROM ALPHA CENTAURI

by JAMES POWELL

Among the secret passageways that riddle the gothic heart of the Canadian Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, there is one that can only be entered through a sliding panel in the Prime Minister's dressing room. Along that narrow corridor, the nation's leader can if he chooses stop every few feet, push aside a peephole cover, and become the eyes of portraits hanging in the various parliamentary committee rooms or in the private coffee shop where the M.P.s and Senators gather to exchange that easy, earthly banter common to politicians everywhere who think themselves unobserved.

If the Prime Minister continues down this passageway to the end, he will come to a tight spiral of stone steps rising two hundred and seventy-five feet to a small balcony just above the clock face in the south side of the Peace Tower. There, leaning forward on the brief

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balustrade like an aquiline gargoyle, he can gaze off toward the prosperous fields of New York State and play with dreams of empire. But sometimes in damp weather his right hand, broken several years before when an overzealous Mountie closed a limousine door on it, would ache, drawing the Prime Minister's eyes to a certain flowerbed below, where Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in full regalia was usually posing for tourist cameras.

On one such day as the Prime Minister watched, some errand drew Bullock toward the tower. The Prime Minister felt his breath quicken and his hands begin to tremble. He looked about his lofty roost with wild, sly eyes. Then and there he would have given his considerable fortune for half a brick. Suddenly, he uttered a hellish laugh and started hopping around on one foot and clawing at the laces of the shoe on the other. With a black chuckle, he hefted the empty leather and sighted down the sole at the broad-brimmed stetson far below. But just before "bombs away," he threw himself back against the wall, let the shoe fall to the floor, and cried real tears. He had almost killed a fellow human being. More than that, he had almost done it with a custom-made shoe with his own name and phone number stamped inside.

Within the hour, the Prime Minister was on the phone to Mountie Commissioner McNaughton with the calm order that Acting Sergeant Bullock never be stationed within a hundred feet of the Peace Tower in damp weather.

McNaughton hung up the phone and cocked his head in wonder. That Bullock sure had the high-ups watching over him. Then the Commissioner saw the rain was falling again.

No Mountie had ever been assigned to guard the back of the Parliament Buildings before. Bullock spent a night boning up on its principal ornament, the Parliamentary Library, with good old Mavis, his wife, holding Charles Dobbin's classic *Lost Nooks and Forgotten Crannies of Parliament Hill* in her lap while he paced up and down in his stocking feet. He struggled particularly to memorize the passage describing the attack of the Thousand Islanders, the river corsair-incendiaries, on the Parliament Buildings during the winter of 1916. "There, through the falling snow, come the muffled ice skates," wrote Dobbin, "rank on perfect rank, each pirate canted forward, hands clasped behind the back, cutlass in armpit, pistols in sash. Look sharp and you will glimpse an eyepatch or a cheek

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scar behind the balaclava. Stealth was theirs but surprise would elude them. A jingling earring brought forth a stern, 'Who goes there?' from R.C.M.P. Constable Garth Nickerson, on duty before the Parliament Buildings.

"As the two hundred attackers surged forward, Nickerson coolly emptied his pistol into them and then fought on with a dead man's cutlass. At last, sheer numbers drove him back inside the building. The incendiaries lit their torches and clattered on ice skates down every corridor. Mortally wounded, hemmed in by pirate steel, Nickerson made the attackers pay for every inch down the raging inferno of the Hall of Honour. In one moment, his back came up against the Library doors. In the next, a ceiling fell and Nickerson slipped inside and locked the great fireproof doors after him. He died at the foot of the statue of Queen Victoria which dominates the reading room, a work purchased by the government from the British sculptor Marshall Wood for $10,000 in 1871.

"The Library itself, a handsome and well proportioned structure in the Italian gothic style, is approximately 140 feet in diameter and rises ninety feet to a dome. The building has sixteen sides, a number which in Scotland, the boyhood home of Canada's first Prime Minister, was called a baker's fortnight and considered a lucky measure. Note the early English caps on the pinnacles and the admirably chaste and crocket-free flying buttresses. Surely on first glance the Parliamentary Library resembles nothing so much as the crown of some primitive tsar or metropolitain."

Bullock spent the first hour the next morning stroking his mustache, reciting this passage to himself, and stared up at the building. Then a voice at his elbow said, "Glad you people take an interest in this."

Swallowing the tail end of a yawn, Bullock turned to find an elderly, pear-shaped man with a good-natured mouth and large gentle eyes. He wore a grey-tweed jacket, trousers of another grey and worn but respectable shoes. He also wore a crisp number-ten-size brown paper bag on his head.

"Come again?" requested Bullock.

The man smiled. "See if this fits, son. When you were a sprat, your mom sent you to a dancing class run by maiden ladies, a tall thin dark one with a squint, a plump little piano player with grey hair. That piano player was your first crush."

"Miss Augusta!" exclaimed Bullock who had quite forgotten her, though he still remembered the little bow with the right forearm

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across the stomach and the left across the back. "Did you know her?" he demanded. "You from Dawson City, too?"

"No, son, I took my dancing lessons right here in Ottawa. But you see, those two maiden ladies or two others just like them can be found in every Canadian city or hamlet. They were the objects of our first crushes. They are, in fact, the mythic glue that binds this great country of ours together from sea to sea."

Bullock blinked and screwed up his memory to remember "mythic glue." Wait till he dropped that on the guys at the Headquarters canteen.

"Another thing," said the man, "get your crush on the tall, dark one with the squint and you invariably choose a life of crime. Pick the piano player and you take the path of lawfulness. Easy to tell which one a Mountie chose." He offered his hand. "And so did Elvin Huff." When Bullock introduced himself, Huff gestured toward the Parliamentary Library. "Welcome aboard, Maynard. This is sure too big for us to handle."

An oddball, thought Bullock. But the old guy seemed harmless enough. Besides, he wanted to try out his spiel on the Library. "That handsome and well proportioned structure is in the Italian gothic style," he said.

"The Diddo Masters of Alpha Centauri don't miss a trick, I give them that."

"It's like the crown of some primitive tsar," said Bullock, uncertain what a metropolitain was.

"Speaking of headgear, you people ought to try these," said Huff, indicating his paper bag, which was marked *Watchful Sons of Mother Earth* with a careless rubber stamp. "Guaranteed to ward off the fuddle guns of the Space Dragoons."

Bullock ignored the remark and observed, "Keeping the crockets off the flying buttresses there sure gives them a chaste look."

"Flying buttresses? Hell, those are retro-rockets," insisted Huff. "A retro flame-out caused the 1916 fire. Yes, sir, that night, under cover of a snowstorm they'd laid in just for the occasion, the Alpha Centaurii swooped down out of the sky, disintegrated the real library, and landed that perfect replica in its place."

"No—Thousand Islanders, you mean."

"Maynard, you never believed that," said Huff with a good-natured laugh. "No, it was a spaceship from Alpha Centauri." He hooked his arm in Bullock's. "Come on, let me give you a tour of the damn thing."

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Why not, thought Bullock, who'd never seen the inside of the library.

"Now if you people used these helmets," said Huff as they mounted the steps, "the fuddle guns couldn't make you fall for wild stories like river pirates. Damned expensive, though. Mr. Raoul buys in bulk and sells to us at cost. But it's still an arm and a leg."

Bullock's eyes narrowed. "Mr. Raoul?"

"President of the Watchful Sons," said Huff as they entered the library. "He collects dues, sells us stuff, and levies fines if we screw up our assignments. Some members squeeze a week out of a helmet. Me, I use a fresh one every other day. Like Mr. Raoul says, old people shouldn't let themselves go."

Huff led Bullock up two flights and into a handsome book-lined alcove of carved blond wood. From a wrought-iron railing, they could look down onto the red-topped tables of the library proper. "This is the heart of the beast," murmured the old man, adding, "You read much, Maynard?"

"I do my share. Phrenology mostly. That's a sideline of mine. And of course a lot of outdoorsy stuff."

"Fiction?"

"You mean, like *War and Peace?*"

"That's the ticket," said Huff. "Ever finish the darn thing?"

"I tried," insisted Bullock.

"We all do," smiled Huff. "We take up a book with the best intentions but a few pages in and down come the eyelids."

"By godfrey, I'll say."

Huff leaned closer. "Somehow the Alpha Centaurii have converted our books, those treasure chests of knowledge, into sump pumps to suck off our brain waves. They don't have electricity, you see. On their worlds, whole cities are powered by the brain waves of earthlings trying to slog through the first fifty pages of *War and Peace.* Somehow it's all relayed here to be transmitted to Alpha Centauri." He stopped. "Listen! Hear that hum?"

"The air-conditioning," suggested Bullock.

Huff made a fuddle gun of his forefinger and thumb. "Zing, they got you again, Maynard," he smiled. "No, they're transmitting." Huff looked around the alcove. "My assignment has been to find the ignition switch that'll send this darn thing hurtling back where it came from. We know the switch's behind a book somewhere. I've got

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this far and I think I'm getting warm. Well, come on. There's more to see."

Shaking his head at the deluded old man, Bullock followed him out of the library through the door into the Parliament Buildings. At the end of the corridor behind the Senate Chamber, they took a staircase and entered the visitors' gallery of the Senate, a chapel-like chamber dressed with weighty bronze chandeliers, beneath which the hoary-headed members of Canada's upper house nodded at their black-walnut desks while tipstaff ushers glided silently among them, pausing now and then to lay a polite, reviving, white-gloved hand on the shoulder of a dozing Senator.

"Mr. Raoul was the first to point out this phenomenon," whispered Huff. "A transmitting cylinder must be cracked. It's draining off all the brain waves around it. These people needed helmets bad. Well, it pretty much cost me the last of my savings but I sent each one a helmet and a covering letter. A hundred and two Senators. You think one of them would wear the darn things?" He shook a tragic head and looked down onto the senate floor. "The brain waves of the finest minds in the land are being spirited away to power a pop-up toaster 4.3 light-years away."

As they started back, Huff said fretfully, "Now Mr. Raoul says the brain-wave loss has crept to the House of Commons. That means two hundred and sixty-four more helmets. I guess I'll have to sell my stamp collection."

"Your Mr. Raoul sounds like quite a sweetheart," said Bullock. "What else does he do besides collect money from you people?"

"Manages a pool hall," said Huff. "Isn't that a great cover? And he does himself up to look the part. You know—sideburns down to here and a big belt-buckle. When our retirement checks arrive, we meet in his back room and he stands us to coffee and filled doughnuts, collects our dues, and gives us our orders. This is Watchful Sons of Mother Earth membership month. We get fined if we don't sign someone up." Huff thought for a moment. "You much of a joiner, Maynard?"

"After you join the Mounties you don't have to join anything else," said Bullock.

Huff nodded as if he understood.

Suddenly Bullock had a brainstorm. This might just settle Mr. Raoul's greasy hash. Maybe the law couldn't prevent the con man from taking the oldsters' freely given money, but Bullock might just

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be able to throw enough of a scare into the guy to make him skip town. "Sign me up, Elvin," he announced.

"You mean it, Maynard?" said the delighted Huff, searching through his pockets. "You mean it?" He drew out a crumpled piece of paper with the mimeographed statement: "I wish to apply for membership in the Watchful Sons of Mother Earth because I agree with them that the Parliamentary Library in Ottawa is a spaceship from Alpha Centauri."

Bullock smiled. Yes, that would do nicely. He rested the application against Huff's offered back and signed his name with a flourish: Sergeant Maynard Bullock of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. And if that didn't run Mr. Raoul off, maybe Bullock would show up in full uniform at the next meeting and have a filled doughnut or two.

Late the next morning while Bullock marched up and down behind the Parliament Buildings, a solemnly clad gentleman armed with a homburg, a briefcase, and a professional air stepped from a car to wonder if he was having the honor of addressing Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock. The Mountie cocked a cautious eyebrow.

"My name is Ralston," said the man. "I'm a lawyer." He looked invitingly toward a park bench.

"Not while I'm on duty," said Bullock.

"Shall we stroll then?" said Ralston, gesturing to indicate the direction and starting off at once. Bullock would have preferred to set the course and pace himself but he fell in step. "Are you aware of the Todwinter Prize?" asked Ralston. When Bullock shook his head, the lawyer continued, "I thought as much. My family, which has administrated the prize for four generations, never saw any need to publicize it."

He gazed at Bullock through silver-rimmed glasses. "Andrew Todwinter, late of this city, made a fortune in the fur trade in the 1860s. In the course of an eccentric old age, he became enamored of space travel, dreaming of outposts on distant stars where other-worldly furs could be traded for terrestrial trinkets. To this end, he established a prize of forty thousand dollars and accumulated interest to be awarded to anyone or any group that invents or finds an interstellar vehicle." Here Ralston made a sharp about face and paced back the way they had come.

Bullock had stopped dead in his tracks. Now he ran to catch up.

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"What does all this have to do with me?" he puffed, suspecting he knew the answer.

"Mr. Todwinter had other peculiarities in his dotage. For example, he established hostels for dogs of the Pekinese tribe prone like their mistresses to an afternoon tipple of the wine and sherry persuasion. And he developed a very bad case of hero-worship for the Northwest Mounted Police, as I believe your organization was then called. He wore one of your old uniforms with the pillbox hat to stargaze on the lawn. Well, in a word, under the terms of the Todwinter Prize, any member of the Mounted Police can certify something as an interstellar vehicle." Here, Ralston made the about turn again, leaving the dumfounded Bullock standing far behind him.

When Bullock finally caught up, Ralston said, "Yesterday I received a telephone call from a Mr. Raoul of the Watchful Sons of Mother Earth claiming the Todwinter Prize on the basis of a statement signed by you." Ralston stopped. He looked up at the Library, then at Bullock, and he smiled coldly. "Mr. Raoul made an appointment to visit me in my offices that very evening. He never arrived. However, I rather think I will hear from him before sunset tonight when the hundred-year time-frame of the Todwinter Prize will expire. You see, Andrew Todwinter's modest sum has now grown to a good five million plus."

"Good godfrey!" said Bullock, quickly explaining how he'd joined the Watchful Sons just to throw a scare into Mr. Raoul.

"Be that as it may," said Ralston, "I will oblige you to admit on the stand that the whole thing was an imbecilic attempt to run Mr. Raoul out of town. Then his lawyer will insist you're lying under oath because Mr. Raoul refused to submit to your extortion demands or some such story. Whichever way the court rules, you may be sure of two things: you will have made the Mounted Police a national laughingstock and you'll be up on charges for police harassment or perjury or extortion. Good day to you, Acting Sergeant."

Bullock found he was sweating, though it was not a hot day. "Why tell me all this?" he demanded as the lawyer walked away.

"Because I wouldn't want anything to happen to you that might make you miss our rendezvous in court," said Ralston, getting into his car. He stuck his head out the window. "I suggest you avoid dark alleys, blunt instruments, and food served by strangers."

As Ralston backed out and drove away, a small car followed after him. When the driver, who must have been sitting there all during their talk, reached out to adjust the sideview mirror, the Mountie

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glimpsed a white cuff, a single stripe of gold, and either a crossed martini glass and shuffleboard stick or a crossed push broom and shovel. Once more, Bullock's hours of browsing through *Jane's Uniforms and Insignia of the World* stood him in good stead. The driver was either an assistant purser of an Italo-Iberian Line cruise ship or an unterinspektor of the Viennese Street Sanitation Department.

Bullock paced the morning away with the newspaper headlines glaring larger and longer in his mind's eye at every step.

MOUNTIE SAYS LIBRARY CAME FROM OUTER SPACE.

BULLOCK URGES PAPER HELMETS FOR SENATORS.

LET ALPHA CENTAURII EAT PALE TOAST, DECLARES MAN IN SCARLET.

All this to the accompaniment of courtroom laughter. By godfrey, wondered Bullock, how do I manage to get myself in these pickles?

It was noon before he decided there was only one way out: he'd trick Mr. Raoul into showing him that application, snatch it out of the man's hand, and swallow the damn thing whole. But for that, he needed the address of the poolroom. In the hope that he might run into Huff there, Bullock decided to take his lunch hour in the nearby Sparks Street promenade. Such excursions were no problem. Lanyard, service pistol, Sam Brown belt, and spurs could be put in his hat and hidden in the bushes. Turned inside-out, the Mountie tunic became a snappy hound's-tooth nehru jacket—as many a spy and drug smuggler had been astonished to discover. And Bullock always carried a roll of navy-blue tape to cover the lemon stripe down his breeches.

Sparks Street bulged with noon. Bullock carried his double order of fish and chips, a handful of malt-vinegar envelopes, and a jumbo iced tea about until he found the empty edge of a concrete planter to sit on. Frowning at his predicament, he ate his lunch mouthful by tragic mouthful until it lay on his stomach like gloom itself. Then he stuffed the wrappings into the empty paper cup and tossed it into a wire receptacle some four feet away.

A basket! Maybe he'd run away to another country, change his name, and become a professional basketball player with Mavis as team cook. Cheered somewhat by this prospect, he looked around him. A dejected Elvin Huff sat on a nearby bench, paper helmet and all. "Elvin," said Bullock, going over and sitting beside him, "the very man I'm looking for. I've got to see Mr. Raoul."

"No problem, son," said Huff. "St. Magnus the Great Church this

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afternoon at three. A simple ceremony followed by burial at Beechwood Cemetery. The Space Dragoons got him yesterday." Huff patted Bullock's knee. "Well, anyway, your application sure made his last hours golden. I heard him shouting like a kid into the office telephone. Then he came rushing back out to tell me he'd been called away to start a chapter of the Watchful Sons on the French Riviera. He named me vice president with right of succession of our Ottawa chapter as per the bylaws.

"And just about the time I finished inventorying the helmets in the supply closet, he was back downstairs with his suitcase packed. I asked should I call a cab, but he said he had some business within walking distance. Well, I went partway to carry his suitcase and talk about my plans for the chapter. Finally, he took back the suitcase and offered me his hand. 'Peace in the Galaxy, Mr. Raoul,' I said. 'Don't take any wooden nickels, Elvin,' he answered.

"He crossed the street. I stood there watching until he turned the corner. Then I started back. That's when I heard the squeal ofbrakes and the ungodly thump. I heard a car door slam. Then a vintage café-au-lait-colored Rolls Royce with diplomatic plates came barreling around the corner. I ran across the street and there was Mr. Raoul lying dead on the sidewalk. Why would the Space Dragoons turn out his pockets?"

"Who the heck are these Space Dragoons?"

"The defenders of the transmitter," said Huff. "They will abide no threat to it by word or deed. Mr. Raoul used to tell us stories about them on stormy nights. They're insubstantial, but they can seize control of our machines when they want to harm us. Old Westcot got his in front of the Parliament Buildings chasing his helmet across the lawn. A riding mower swerved abruptly and cut him to ribbons. And they put Simpson down as heart attack, but I saw all those machines crowded around his hospital bed, sucking out his vital energies." He hung his head. "So now I'm president of the Watchful Sons. At least we're still ten strong. A new man signed up at the poolroom this morning. A guy named Meadows."

"Now what, Elvin?"

"Maynard, the Space Dragoons are running scared. I must be close to the ignition switch. I owe it to Mr. Raoul's memory to send that damned library back to Alpha Centauri where it belongs."

"Suppose—just suppose—it wasn't spacemen that killed Mr. Raoul," said Bullock. To make his point, he explained to the astonished Huff about the Todwinter Prize.

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Huff smiled. "Why, if it's humans I'll be as safe as in my mother's arms. Mere humans wouldn't dare pull anything with those lady librarians around.

"Peace in the Galaxy, Maynard," he said, standing up. When Bullock made to rise, Huff said, "No, let me go ahead. The less we're seen together, the better for you."

As the clock in the Peace Tower struck one, Bullock was back in the bushes, and as he always did when he had put on his uniform he came to attention and gave a smart salute. At that same moment a voice behind him said, "Freeze!" and he felt the pressure of a pistol in the small of his back. "Twitch and you're one dead sucker," the voice assured him. "Now, march!"

Bullock was prodded out of the bushes and over to a café-au-lait Rolls. There he saw his captor, a small, rabbit-faced man in boots and a dark-green chauffeur's outfit. They appraised each other up and down as men in uniform do. Then the chauffeur opened the rear door of the Rolls, waved his automatic, and said, "Get in!"

Still saluting, Bullock ducked his head and stepped inside. Three quarters of the back seat was occupied by a lounging, handsome, red-lipped woman in her fifties in a white-fur hat and muff. Two little black-eyed, pug-faced Pekinese in her lap began to bark and four more on the floor took up the racket.

"What's that, boys?" asked the woman. "Yes, you're right, this is the Mountie who opened the whole can of worms." As Bullock sat down, she warned, "No, I wouldn't lower your arm, Acting Sergeant. The boys might take that as an aggressive act." As she spoke, two more Pekinese rose up from the rear-window shelf to growl in Bullock's ears and sniff at his jugular.

Bullock had once seen a television documentary in which a cow wading an Amazon tributary had been devoured from the ankles up by a school of piranha. He kept saluting.

"Actually, you're seeing the boys at their best," said the woman. "They so love our rides in the car." Then she gave a broad and charming smile. "Well, now, my name is Lucy di Lammermoor. Perhaps Mr. Ralston spoke of me."

"No, ma'am, he did not," said Bullock.

"Well, if no one wins the Todwinter Prize by sunset today, the money goes to the Pekinese Protective League. Old Andrew Todwinter founded the League with a small bequest in his will. The membership was never large. Today I'm all that's left. President,

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membership chairman, and membership all in one. Until you stumbled into this business, all I had to do to be a wealthy woman was sit back and wait."

Bullock explained how his clever plan of eating the application had been foiled because Mr. Raoul was dead.

"So I understand," replied Lucy di Lammermoor. "Now if that missing application was in my possession, I'd burn it right before your eyes to put both our minds to rest. And the boys and I think you'd do the same." The dogs showed Bullock their teeth in unison.

"I sure would," he said quickly.

"Then I think you and I should ask ourselves who does have the application," suggested Lucy di Lammermoor.

"What about Ralston?" asked Bullock. Who else was there?

"But he has nothing to gain," she said. "Either someone wins the Todwinter Prize by sunset or the money goes to me. Either way, Ralston's out of the picture entirely. No, we have to ask ourselves who would profit from having the application now that Mr. Raoul's dead."

"By godfrey—Elvin Huff!" shouted Bullock. "He's president of the Watchful Sons now and he was right there after Mr. Raoul was run down!"

"Boys," asked Lucy di Lammermoor, "what should the Acting Sergeant do now?" The dogs barked up a considerable answer. The woman nodded and said, "They think you should toddle right over and get that application from Mr. Huff by force if necessary. Then they think you should bring it to my place. We'll have a little burning and then toast the sunset with champagne. —Oh, and the boys say don't be late or they'll come looking for you."

As she wrote out her address on a card, the dogs sniffed at Bullock's boots and looked up at him with wise, cruel eyes that said they'd know where to find him if they wanted him. "And they'll be such handsome boys when next you see them," said Lucy di Lammermoor. "We're on our way around the corner to the doggy groomers."

Bullock cradled his numb saluting arm in his good one and started for the library entrance. At the top of the steps stood Ralston, shaking his fist at the departing Rolls.

"That was her, wasn't it? That was the unnatural monster!" he shouted. He gave Bullock a stricken look, threw his hands over his face, and sobbed deeply, the tears welling out between his fingers.

In Canada it is considered unlucky to see a lawyer cry, so Bullock

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looked away. He never knew how to handle these emotional situations. "There, there," was all he could ever think to say.

It seemed to work. "Thank you," sniffed Ralston, getting control of himself. "Mr. Huff in there just told me how she had our own son killed."

"Mr. Raoul was your son?" asked the astonished Mountie. "Lucy di Lammermoor was your wife?"

In mournful tones, Ralston told of their happy days as young marrieds, times marred only by the bleak prospect that someday the Todwinter Prize millions would have to be handed over to the Pekinese Protective League, and the percentage of the income from that money which had supported several Ralston generations would vanish. As years passed, Lucy pressed her husband to find some way of defrauding the League of the money. When he refused, she accused him of depriving their son Raoul of his due inheritance. At last she ran off with the chauffeur, taking the Rolls in lieu of her gin-rummy winnings over the years of their marriage.

"She always had a weakness for men in uniform," said Ralston.

"I know how that is," nodded Bullock gravely.

Not long after, Raoul quit college to set up the Watchful Sons of Mother Earth, an organization by which he hoped to win the Todwinter Prize money. It was only later that he turned it into a cynical scam to support himself and his vices on the gullibility of others.

"How that boy used to laugh at all the ways those poor saps let him fleece them," said Ralston, disapprovingly.

Meanwhile, Lucy married the chauffeur and they started a service called Diplolimo, renting the Rolls out to embassies too small to afford their own limousine. Lucy also joined the Pekinese Protective League and over the years rose high in its membership.

"When Raoul missed our appointment, I wrote it off as more of his irresponsible ways," said Ralston. "Still, there was a lot at stake, so I dropped down here to the library in case your Mr. Huff might know where he was. I recognized him from the paper bag. When Mr. Huff told me about Raoul, I ran from the place crying like a baby. In fact, I almost killed myself tripping over an industrial-sized vacuum cleaner somebody must have left in the hall outside the alcove after I arrived."

Ralston's jaw dropped as Bullock bolted through the library door.

Elvin Huff lay dead on the alcove floor, the hose of the vacuum cleaner twisted tightly around his neck, his brown paper bag on the

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floor beside him. Bullock nudged the machine with his toe. It was turned off. As he placed his revolver back in its holster, he looked down sadly at the dead body. "Peace in the Galaxy, Elvin," said Bullock, and, coming to attention, he gave the corpse a snappy salute.

"Freeze!" ordered a familiar voice behind him. Oh, blast, thought the Mountie. This is where I came in.

"Killing the old guy didn't get you off the hook," snarled the chauffeur. "All it does is complicate things."

"I didn't kill him—I found him like this," said Bullock loudly. He wanted to attract attention. But there was never a librarian around when you needed one.

"Tell me another," scoffed di Lammermoor as he prodded Bullock in the back. "But tell me outside." Stuffing his weapon inside his jacket, he followed the saluting Mountie down the stairs to the library proper, where, instead of going out the back way, he ordered Bullock out the front. You just made one big mistake, mister, said Bullock to himself. But the two Mounties on duty in the rotunda of the Hall of Confederation solemnly returned Bullock's salute and let them pass. Oh, good godfrey, thought Bullock.

Outside the entrance stood the Rolls with a flag of Albania on each front fender. The chauffeur directed Bullock around to the driver's side. "Get in and slide over," he ordered. "And make it snappy. We've got some fancy rescheduling up the road."

In a moment, they were on their way, flags flying. "The old geezer didn't have what you wanted," said the chauffeur. "I do. I took it from Raoul's body after I ran him down."

"What say I lower my arm?" suggested Bullock. "We don't salute much in cars. People might get suspicious."

"Drop that arm and I might suspect you're going for your gun. I've killed for less."

Bullock's eyes grew shrewd. "You're kidding, eh?"

The chauffeur laughed. "That's how she's president of the Pekinese Protective League. The Diplolimo thing was one sweet deal. She'd tell me when and where and I'd swing a client a bit out of the way going to the Ambassadors' Fancy Dress Ball or whatever and pick off the League membership one at a time. Hell, once I drove right through their Strawberry Festival and got ten in a single shot. I had the Ambassador from Upper Simba convinced Canadians scream and shake their fists as an expression of welcome." He smiled, remembering. "The tenth one almost gave me the slip. A regular

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gazelle. I chased her for three blocks and would've lost her for sure, but the cop saw me coming with flags flying and held back the traffic. Diplomatic plates are a license to kill."

Di Lammermoor pulled up to a seedy-looking greystone apartment building with an Albanian coat of arms on the shield beside the entrance. He walked the saluting Mountie into the vestibule, pushed one of a row of buttons, and announced into a speaker: "Your car is here to take you to the sheep-judging, Mr. Ambassador."

As they waited, di Lammermoor said, "I've done the dirty work, but I know wifey means to cut me out. I know there's another guy. So, hey, I said to myself, why not go to Huff with the application? Offer it to him for a fifty-fifty split of the prize and agree to blow you away so there'll be no retraction? That'd put me back in the driver's seat again. —Out of the driver's seat, I mean, and back with Lucy where I belong. But thanks to your killing Huff, there's only one way out now, let the bodies fall where they may."

He thought about that. "Five'll get you ten her new guy's a swell dancer. The dance floor was never my element, though I took lessons when I was a kid in Toronto."

"From two old maiden ladies, right?" asked Bullock. "And you had a crush on the skinny, dark-haired one—the one with the squint, right?"

"How the hell'd you know that?" growled di Lammermoor, reaching for his pistol. "And that was no squint. More like a come-hither look."

Here the Albanian Ambassador arrived, a blocky, bullet-headed individual in a double-breasted gabardine suit and ox-blood brogans. He had once appeared at a Mountie smoker to introduce a National Film Board of Albania travelogue entitled "Spring Comes to the Isle of Screams," a description of daily life on that country's principal prison colony. Several of Bullock's colleagues had to leave midway. Others admitted to nightmares the next day. Bullock attributed his own bad night to a meatloaf sandwich just before hitting the sack.

The Ambassador settled down in the back of the Rolls and buried his nose in a comic book. He did not observe that for several minutes they traveled away from his destination at the Central Experimental Farm.

"Look at that," said the chauffeur at last. "Perfect timing. I am about to become the last surviving member of the Watchful Sons."

Ahead of them, a hearse was parked at the curb in front of St.

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Magnus the Great Church while down its front steps came a coffin and eight pallbearers wearing paper bags on their heads.

"Then you're Meadows?" demanded Bullock.

"Meadows di Lammermoor at your service," said the chauffeur, jabbing his pistol into Bullock's stomach. "Don't try anything funny."

As the Rolls roared up onto the sidewalk, the startled pallbearers began a clumsy, burdened run along the sidewalk. The Rolls edged to the right. The pallbearers edged to the left, saw an open parking space, and veered out into the street.

"Good," said di Lammermoor, following out after them. "You have to use the noggin to get them to zig when you want them to zig. Sooner or later, they'll zig when they should have zagged."

As the jogging pallbearers and the coffin approached a sharp turn in the street, di Lammermoor leaned on the horn. The panting old men looked back with terrified red faces. As they did, the outer file crossed the center line and was knocked off neatly by an oncoming bus. Two fell under the tires, a third was pitched high into the air, and the fourth was hurled back into the path of the Rolls.

The coffin fell to the street and the four remaining pallbearers ran on ahead of the Rolls in Indian file. "From here on in, it's sitting-ducks'ville," mused di Lammermoor. Even as he spoke, the third man in line went down, clutching his heart and tripping up the fourth. Both vanished, to reappear briefly as bumps beneath the car. Then di Lammermoor revved the motor, panicking the second man, who tried to dart to the other side of the street. He vanished in a twinkling beneath the traffic. The remaining oldster sprinted on, head back, arms pumping. "I respect this guy's spirit," admitted di Lammermoor. "He loves life."

But at the next intersection, the light was against them. Fear of jaywalking made the runner hesitate and in that brief moment the Rolls ran him down.

Fifteen minutes later, with Bullock still trembling with helpless rage, the limousine delivered the chuckling Albanian Ambassador and his comic book to his destination. Only then did di Lammermoor speak again.

"Time to see wifey. My, my, isn't she going to be surprised."

Lucy di Lammermoor was seated at the baby grand in a peacock-blue sequined cocktail dress, playing a medley of tunes from *Song of Tripoli*, when Bullock appeared in the doorway of the richly fur-

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nished upstairs living room. "Come in and join the celebration, Acting Sergeant," she said, smiling brightly. "There'll be champagne." Then she saw her husband behind him. "Oh, you're here, too, Meadows. Well, come in. I was going to ring for you, anyway. Time we had a little talk."

Noticing Bullock's apprehension, she added, "The boys have been locked up without din-din to keep them keen as mustard in case they had to be sent to get you, Acting Sergeant." She offered him a wing chair by the fireplace. "That's enough saluting for now," she said. "Please excuse us. Meadows and I have a little family matter."

Bullock preferred to stand. It was now as painful to lower his arm as to keep it raised. Resting his aching limb on the fireplace mantel, he almost sighed out loud with relief.

Turning to her husband, Lucy said, "No beating about the bush, Meadows. I love another. Tonight I go to Ralston to pick up the certified check for the five million plus. Then my beloved Nicky and I will sail out of your life forever. I will leave you the Rolls and an allowance sufficient to your modest needs. Please don't make a scene."

When Meadows di Lammermoor laughed darkly, she frowned and turned to Bullock. "Perhaps we should burn a certain foolish document now," she said.

"The lummox doesn't have it, wifey," said the chauffeur triumphantly. "I do. And as of a few minutes ago, I'm the president of the Watchful Sons." He pointed his automatic at Bullock. "And warm dogfood here doesn't get to stand up in court to retract his statement."

Bullock stiffened. The shot made him cry out for he jumped and his aching arm slipped from the mantel.

Di Lammermoor found this vaguely amusing. Then the automatic dropped from his fingers and he fell, first to his knees and then face-forward onto the hearth rug, revealing the bloody hole from the bullet in his back.

A tanned young man in the white uniform of an assistant purser of the Italo-Iberian Lines stood in the doorway. Perched high on the fingertips of his left hand was a tray holding glasses and a magnum of champagne. A small Beretta smoked in the fingers of the right.

"Just in time, Nicky," said Lucy.

"Now we can get married, no?" asked the young man with a fine display of teeth.

"That's no way to talk to a widow in mourning," she said. "Get

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poor Meadows out of here and we'll toast the good times ahead." While Nicky pulled the corpse out of the room by its ankles, she observed, "I always have my menfolk do my killing for me."

"I'll mention that when I take the stand," said Bullock.

"I need hardly fear the word of a man who thinks the Parliamentary Library's from outer space," said Lucy, raising her husband's pistol menacingly. She crossed to the bedroom door. "How about one last salute for old times' sake?" she ordered.

Bullock groaned inwardly but saluted.

"Boys, look who's dropped in for a bite," called Lucy, opening the door. Eight yapping Pekinese tumbled into the room. Six hemmed in Bullock's feet. The other two leaped from floor to wing chair to mantel and menaced his throat. "What's that, boys?" said Lucy. "You don't want me to wrap him, you'll eat him here?" She smiled brightly. "No, you clever little beasts know the rules. Touch not unless he moves. And talking doesn't count."

"Why'd you have to kill Huff?" demanded Bullock.

"I've never killed anyone," said Lucy. "Nicky?"

The young man had just come back into the room. He looked vaguely hurt. "Am I a savage who kills people he doesn't even know?"

Lucy filled two glasses. They toasted each other, drained the champagne, and fell into each other's arms in a torrid embrace.

Glancing away discreetly, Bullock found himself eyeball to eyeball with a mantel Pekinese with a mean set of teeth. He closed his eyes and turned his mind to Elvin Huff's murder. If these people hadn't killed him, who had? Maybe the old guy'd been right all along about the Space Dragoons. Bullock imagined himself in the witness box, resplendent in a uniform just back from the cleaners.

"May it please the court," he heard himself saying, "not only do I submit that this woman and her paramour killed Meadows di Lammermoor before my very eyes, but I intend to prove that the Parliamentary Library is really a spaceship from Alpha Centauri."

Out of the ensuing turmoil of shouts and flashbulbs, Bullock would lead the judge and the jurors to the third-floor library alcove and uncover the alien ignition switch. The next day, with flags flying and the Mountie band galloping by on horseback with trumpets and kettledrums and the whole nine yards, Bullock would kneel on one knee before the Prime Minister and accept the credentials that would make him Canada's Ambassador to Outer Space.

Then, as the crowd cheered and the television cameras rolled,

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Bullock and good old Mavis would mount the library steps. In the doorway, Bullock would turn and salute. On second thought, he'd just wave and shout, "Peace in the Galaxy!" in English and in French. Then he'd stride inside and up to the control alcove, where he would take a deep breath, give Mavis waiting down by the check-out desk a reassuring smile, and pull the switch.

Bullock opened his eyes. Lucy and Nicky were still hard at it. He closed his eyes and returned to the Library. For an instant the building would tremble. Then the immense rockets buried two floors beneath the Library, devices whose purpose the janitorial staff had puzzled over for years, would ignite, engulfing Parliament Hill in an immense cloud of smoke. With sudden stateliness, the Library would emerge from the cloud high above the ground and soar majestically up into the blue—now a speck, now quite vanished from view. Then they would go into overdrive or whatever it was libraries went into to travel at the speed of light. In four years and a bit, the Alpha Centaurii would be oohing and ahing over Bullock's uniform. He would teach them everything about electricity so they wouldn't need human brain waves. Mavis would share her pumpkin-bread recipe. The grateful inhabitants would ask them to rule the many worlds of Alpha Centauri as King Maynard and Queen Mavis.

"Sorry to intrude on a happy woolgatherer, Acting Sergeant," said Lucy. "Nicky's starting to take down the bags. So this will have to be goodbye."

"Remember," warned Bullock, "when we say we always get our man, 'man' embraces 'woman.' " This last was an old Mountie joke.

Lucy gave a throaty laugh. She turned back in the doorway and said, "Here's a tip. The cleaning woman comes in three days. If you haven't moved by then, I reckon the boys'll be hungry enough to take her on instead. I wouldn't mind. The woman's been robbing us blind from the liquor cabinet. Maybe you could slip away while they're taking their after-dinner naps. By then Nicky and I and my five million plus will be far beyond your reach."

As if the closing door were a signal, each dog raised its snarl a nasty decibel. Bullock's arm ached like a son of a gun. He was sweating and the ghost of a tremble had begun in his knees with more, he was sure, to come. He'd never last until the cleaning woman met her well deserved fate. He needed an ingenious plan fast.

And then, by godfrey, he had it! One leg of the table holding the unfinished magnum of champagne rested on a corner of the hearth rug. By sliding one foot forward on the sly, Bullock could jerk the

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rug back and topple the champagne. The little beasts, true to their breed and slaves to tipple, would lap themselves into drunken stupors. A brilliant plan. Except that his foot refused to move when a mantel Pekinese chose that moment to lay a warning paw on Bullock's shoulder and snarl into his ear.

Time was running out. He could hear Nicky slamming car doors down on the street. This noise had an unsettling effect on the dogs. They didn't like being left behind with a drive in prospect. They looked at each other uneasily. When the two on the mantel jumped down and ran to the window to bark their displeasure, Bullock pulled the rug. The sudden odor of champagne overcame the dogs that started for him. In an instant, they were all lapping at the bubbly puddle. In the next, unconscious Pekinese stretched as far as the eye could see.

Bullock burst out of the living room and took the stairs three at a time. He reached the sidewalk just as the Rolls roared away from the curb, revealing Ralston stretched out on the pavement with a wrench in each hand. When he saw Bullock, the lawyer said, "Oh, damn," and threw aside the tools. "All right, you've got me," he said. Sitting up, he nodded at the departing car. "No brakes at all and no steering to speak of. Wait till they try to make that turn."

"But, good godfrey, man, why?" demanded Bullock, pulling the lawyer to his feet.

Ralston raised his hand for silence and watched the Rolls fail to make the turn at the bottom of the street. It crossed the intersection, jumped the curb, and plowed through a park bench and an iron fence at the edge of the high river bank.

"Good godfrey," whispered Bullock as the Rolls dropped from sight.

"Here comes the best part," predicted Ralston. There was the muffled sound of an explosion, followed by a column of black smoke. Then he turned back to Bullock. "Why, you ask? Quite simple: because I didn't want to go to jail. You see, after my family left me, I got to thinking maybe I should—well, not steal the money but speculate with it. Then when the time came I could give the League people what was rightfully theirs and still come out a wealthy man."

"Speculate? You mean the stock market?" asked Bullock.

"Not a bit of it," Ralston assured him. "I mean the ponies. I'm something of a judge of horseflesh and had devised a betting system I was anxious to put to the test. Sometimes I lost. Sometimes I won." He cleared his throat and admitted, "But mostly I lost. By yesterday when Raoul called, all that remained of the Todwinter Prize was a

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mere five hundred thousand. What was I to do? I decided to call his mother, partly to see if that woman had sunk low enough to kill her own flesh and blood, partly to gain the twenty-four hours I needed. You see, this afternoon's race at Woodbine had two mares running at odds of over eleven to one—Dancing Mistress and Piano Player."

"And you picked Dancing Mistress—the tall, dark one—right?" asked Bullock.

"Of course. Greys are bad luck And more than that, the last time I saw Dancing Mistress run she gave me a wink as plain as day as she rounded the clubhouse turn trailing the pack. A half million on her to win would pay off Lucy and leave me a tidy sum for my declining years. A wonderful plan."

"Except she didn't win."

Ralston sighed. "Even the best laid ones oft gang agley," he acknowledged. "But I still don't want to go to jail. So here's the way I read the situation. Only four other people knew about the Todwinter Prize: Lucy, Meadows di Lammermoor, you—and I figured you'd blab to Elvin Huff about it. Was I wrong?"

"No," said Bullock curtly.

"Okay, so if I killed Huff, left you to Lucy and Meadows, and then I killed them by monkeying with the Rolls' brake line and steering knuckle, then I'd be off the hook, right?"

"Close enough," said Bullock.

"Well, you sure couldn't convict me on Huff," insisted Ralston. "But what the hell, you've sure got me on these two. So I'll spend the rest of my life at Fair Haven Penitentiary, where all the lawyers get sent. The nine-hole golf course, the pool, the hobbies and crafts. I could do worse."

Bullock felt pity for the lawyer. "I wouldn't count on Fair Haven if I were you," he said, seeing no reason to let the man delude himself. "That Rolls had diplomatic plates and was flying the Albanian flag. I've a strong hunch the authorities will have to turn you over to Albania for trial." Then, offhandedly, so as not to scare Ralston too much, he asked, "Ever heard of their prison colony called the Isle of Screams?"

"Q"

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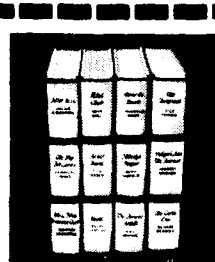

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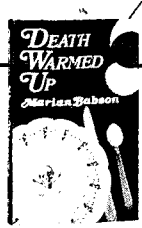

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